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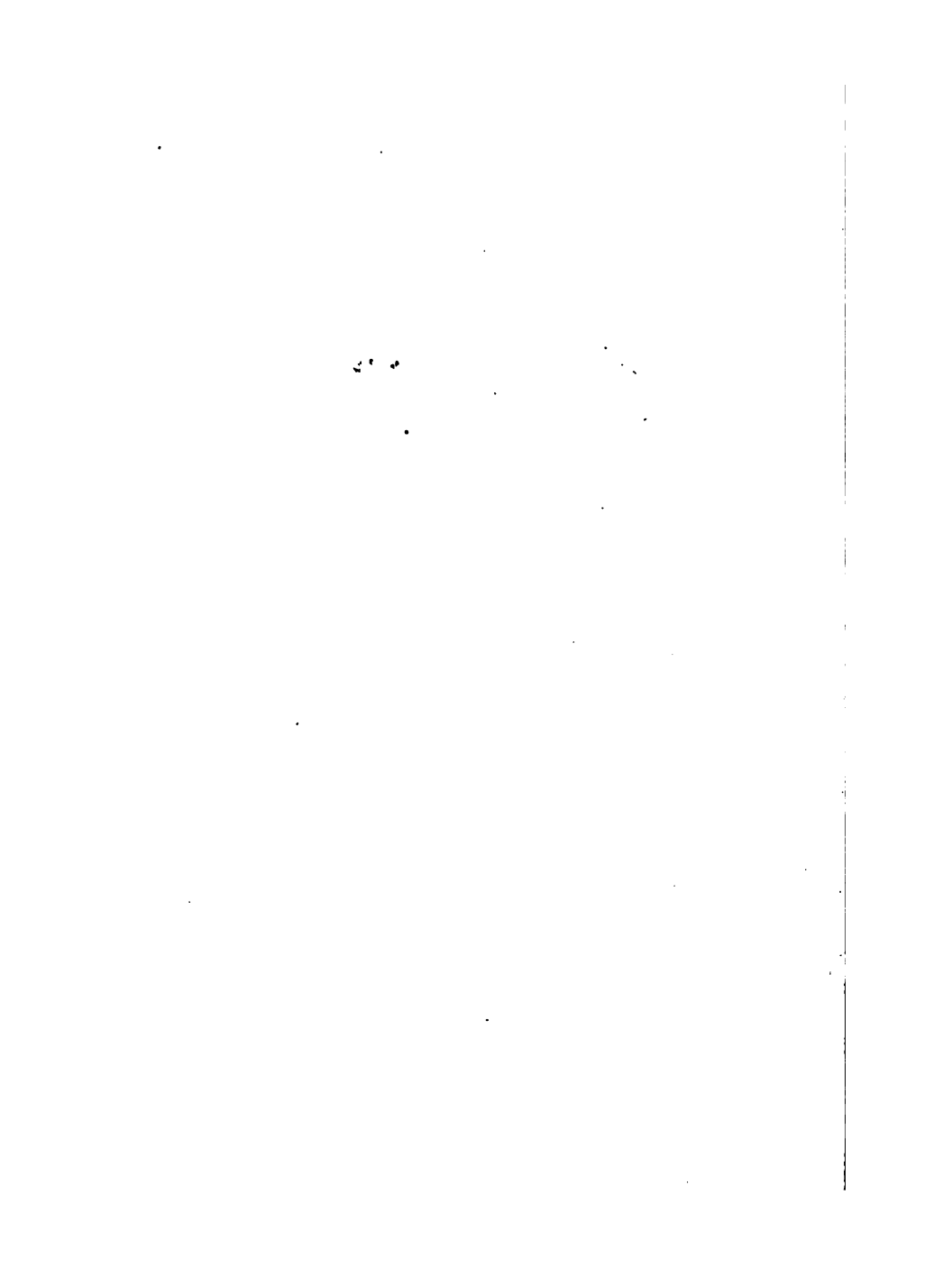
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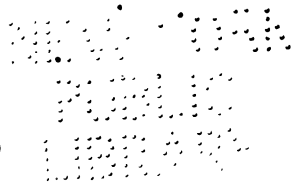
A ROMANCE OF THE MOORS

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MERCANTILE LIBRARY,
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A ROMANCE OF THE MOORS.

CHAPTER I.

wooing and winning.

“**N**OW then, mother, jump up! Look out, lads,—how you *do* manage to get in the way! Considering your size, it's wonderful!”

Before the door of a little gray farm-house stood a very high market-cart, in which uncouth vehicle, the farmer, John Coverdale, with his wife and eldest son, were about to drive their weekly twelve miles downhill to the pleasant town of Dedborough. The florid broad-shouldered Yorkshireman had

already taken up a firm position in the cart, while his excellent Scottish wife was being assisted to mount by Dick, a dark-haired young fellow, whose knee-breeches, brown coat and felt hat set off to full advantage his good looks and fine carriage.

The admonition to his two red-haired young brothers was given good-naturedly, and without the strong Yorkshire accent of his father, or his mother's unmistakable Scottish intonation. According to a frequent custom among this class in her more lettered country, the young man had been sent to the University of St. Andrew's, whence he returned—according to his father—with a store of useless learning and ridiculous manners only fit for idle folk who could afford to sit at home and attend to their airs and graces.

John Coverdale regarded these superficial acquirements as the regrettable representa-

tives of good money thrown away, not recognizing that the young man, from his very childhood, had been remarkable for a peculiar distinction of manner, which the University might have fostered, but could certainly not supply.

In appearance Dick did not "favor his parents," as the country people said, though he possessed the strong, well-set-up frame of the Coverdales, who had lived a simple outdoor life upon these breezy heights above Niddesdale for five or six generations. Some of the older folks in the dale, who remembered Dick's great-grandfather, used to say that "the laad" was the "living image" of the old man.

The two younger boys, Johnny and Tommy, went to the school in Winterbridge, a village at the foot of the hill, while Dick shared with his father and a couple of men the work of the farm.

He had shown himself a stout laborer and a cheery one; yet there was something about the young fellow that seemed to separate him from his comrades. He had wandering instincts, fits of idleness alternating with spurts of fierce energy; and often he would sink into low spirits, for which his mother prescribed "Cockle's Pills," as she was wont to do for all the ailments of body and soul—especially of soul.

"Johnny, just hand me up yon basket of fresh butter," said Mrs. Coverdale, after she had safely mounted. "A'm just taking some to Jean; they canna get any fit to eat in Dedborough, to my thinking."

Jean was Mrs. Coverdale's sister, who had married from Braisted Farm, while on a visit there, Thomas Wellbeloved, the principal grocer in Dedborough.

"And a'm taking a few airly gooseberries," added the kind-hearted farmer's

wife, in her soft accent; "the lassie 'll maybe like them for a pie. She's been accustomed to plenty of fruit and garden-stuff when her mither was alive before she came to live at Dedborough."

"And plenty of care and affection, which I fear she doesn't get under Aunt Jean's roof," Dick added, as he sprang into the cart.

The old mare was startled out of a profound revery, and the cart rattled away down the farm-road, leaving Johnny and Tommy and a large flock of geese intelligently watching its departure. When it was out of sight, the bleak little gray house with its opposite farm-buildings and the wild dike-divided fields stretching to the foot of the moors, sank into profound and melancholy repose.

"Gee oop, Nancy; gee up, my laas!" cried the farmer, encouraging his mare.

“Take care she doesna stumble goin’ doon the hill,” advised his wife nervously. Mrs. Coverdale’s bright-red hair, high cheek-bones, upturned nose and long upper-lip, were powerless to render her face a disagreeable one. The good heart and simple spirit redeemed its homeliness triumphantly.

“Take care o’ they big stones,” Mrs. Coverdale warned. “Nancy nearly came to her knees on them last Saturday when Dick was driving.”

“Oh, Dick drives like a madman!” said his father, jerking up the mare’s head as she stalked down the hill.

Nancy was a mare of bony structure and unfurnished tail, who seemed from the box-seat of the cart to slope steeply towards her head. The descent appeared truly break-neck work, as the lumbering old cart rattled down the narrow road; but Nancy knew its every turn and roughness, for had she not

passed along it weekly for the last twelve years of her useful life?

Arrived at Dedborough, Nancy was put up at the Crown, while her master transacted his business in the market. Regularly every Saturday, Mrs. Coverdale, after she had given her advice on important matters, used to trudge up the High Street to call on her sister, Mrs. Wellbeloved, in the back parlor of the little shop, and here the farmer and his son would join them at tea-time.

Dick, if possible, took care to escape from his family and wander off, in his desultory way, to have a chat with an acquaintance, to bid good-afternoon to some village beauty, or, more often, to linger by the banks of the Nid and watch the fish, the swaying of the water-reeds and the wild life of the river-side.

At the top of the steep little High Street was a certain shop patronized by Dick,

where miscellaneous odds and ends, books and other treasures, were to be found. On this memorable Saturday afternoon he wended his way to his favorite haunt, and there, where the lime-trees were spreading their earliest leaves over the opposite wall of the rectory garden, he came upon a tattered copy of *Poems by Percy Bysshe Shelley*.

“How much is this?” he asked.

“Oh, you can have that ’un cheap: folks don’t run on poetry hereabouts. Two shillings—will that do yer?”

Dick hauled out a long purse that his mother had knitted for him and walked off with the book under his arm. Then he was *not* mad or unusually stupid after all!—or at least he was not alone in his madness! An electric current seemed to cut off his body from the earth, so that he felt emancipated from its thralldom.

The quiet little village street, with its old

inns and small shops, with the river at its foot, and beyond the valley, the great hills leading up to the moors, had taken on a new splendor. Dedborough was fuller than usual, this being market-day. Dick's eyes rested with a far-off beaming benevolence on the farmers as they trudged down the street, on the fair-haired young Doctor as he drove up in his phaeton to the door of his red-brick cottage, nodding to Dick as he alighted.

"Good afternoon, Coverdale! All well at the farm, I hope? Your mother got over her rheumatism?"

"She's better, thank you," said Dick, pausing in his swinging walk.

A maid-servant going up the street with a parcel from the grocer's, glanced admiringly at the stalwart young farmer. The Doctor caught the glance and smiled, though not without a faint pang of envy far away down

in his soul. The young fellow was aggressively handsome. Dr. Hislop was fair, irregular of feature and put together inaccurately.

“How does your father like this weather for his crops?” continued the Doctor, who was fresh to the district and not conversant with the somewhat severe demands of the agriculturist upon the elements.

“Very bad for the hay,” Dick returned; “it’s running up to bloom already. It’ll make no growth worth speakin’ of, if we don’t have rain soon.”

“Give me the farmer who is not dissatisfied with the weather, and I will wear him in my heart of hearts!” laughed the Doctor, leading his horse round to the little stable, and nodding his good-bye.

Vaguely listening to the sound of the retreating hoofs over the paving-stones of the stable-yard, Dick went on down the

street with strides that seemed to swallow the ground in great gulps, and to bring him to the little bow-windowed, low-pitched shop, smelling deliciously of coffee and spices, as if he had on seven-league boots.

THOMAS WELLBELOVED,

GROCER.

Absently Dick's wandering eyes perused the superscription. He rang the bell of the private entrance at the side of the shop, and was ushered by a little maid of fourteen into the presence of the family party.

Thomas Wellbeloved and his wife sat at opposite ends of the table, in whose centre was a bunch of lilacs in a gaudily-painted vase; the Coverdales were at the sides, drinking tea out of the best tea set, and disposed among them sat John Coverdale's two sisters, Jane and Sarah (a neighbor had driven them in from Winterbridge, the vil-

lage at the foot of the Braisted hill), and Bessie Saunders, the grocer's niece, whom he had adopted on her mother's death, about two years ago.

Bessie's pretty face among the sombre company, with her bright fair hair, pink cheeks, and gray pathetic eyes, was like a ray of sunshine in the dull little parlor, with its dispiriting portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Wellbeloved, and of Mr. Wellbeloved's father and mother, which shared the space on the walls with an oleograph of a romantic gorge in Switzerland, and an oil painting representing a Vandyke-brown neighborhood suffering from an impending thunder-storm.

A painter might have thought these faces gathered round the table, in the strong light and shade, a subject for a study after the manner of the Dutch masters; but to the ordinary human being the scene was de-

pressing. The sisters Coverdale perhaps contributed most to this effect, for they had none of the picturesqueness and character of old age, while they sadly lacked the charm and sweetness of youth.

They lived together in a small house in Winterbridge, on a minute income left them by their father, with the help of occasional presents of farm produce from their brother John. Nobody knew to what straits they were often reduced, for on their small pittance they managed to sustain a surprising amount of gentility. It would not be easy to say whether their God or their gentility were in truth nearer and dearer to their souls. So long had they served the two idols in close association, that the incense that they offered to the one object of worship entered at the same time the nostrils of the other.

Jane Coverdale was plump, and not

graceful, with a short nose, light-brown hair very smoothly brushed, small dark-brown eyes, and full cheeks. She wore a mantle of brocaded silk trimmed with jet, and a black bonnet. Her sister Sarah was of more striking appearance. Dick used to compare her to Nancy, not without some color of truth; for Sarah Coverdale was as bony and angular as the old mare, and her long face with the hair scratched fiercely off the harsh forehead, had some ridiculous but undeniable resemblance to Nancy's lengthy and unclassic countenance. Indeed, Johnny and Tommy Coverdale used audaciously to liken Aunt Sarah's hair to poor Nancy's unfortunate tail, though their mother frequently forbade them to harbor the unholy joke. To make matters worse, Miss Coverdale's nose had a very high alpine-looking ridge, suggesting the primeval granite, over which the skin was tightly stretched. The harsh

accents of Mrs. Wellbeloved, a thin-lipped person, were interrupted by the entrance of her nephew. Bessie blushed hotly, turning away from the light, as she felt the blood rushing to her cheeks. But everybody was too much engaged with Dick to notice her.

Mr. Wellbeloved gave him a hearty welcome; the aunt held out a bony hand. "Better late than never, Dick," she said; "sit ye doon beside yer Aunt Jane—there's a chair kept for ye. Bessie, hand him a scone. What's the matter, child? Can't you hold the dish straight? They'll all be on the floor in a minute!" Jane rescued the plate in her brisk, practical way, and began to talk to Dick, while Bessie sat silently on his other side, wondering with beating heart when he would address a word to her.

She longed for and yet dreaded the moment. Her pulses were beating so loudly

that she half feared they must be heard by her neighbors.

Fortunately her aunt and Jane Coverdale were both talking continuously, and her uncle was nobly trying to engage Sarah Coverdale in conversation, Sarah being deaf. Disagreement had set in about the new doctor's age: Mrs. Wellbeloved fighting with much heat for seven-and-twenty, while Jane was equally firm about twenty-five.

The grocer, out of sheer relief at finding his wife for once vigorously opposed, espoused the cause against her, swearing that Dr. Hislop could not be a day older than five-and-twenty, in which opinion he was supported by the farmer. Sarah surprised everyone in the midst of the discussion by calling out "Fourteen last September!"

"Fourteen! My dear Sarah, what *are* you thinking of?" shouted Jane in her ear.

But Sarah persisted.

She remembered as well as possible; it was just fourteen years come Michaelmas—and Jane ought to remember it too, for John had taken them to the manger and shown them the mare and foal—and a pretty little creature she was then!

“Why, the lass is talking about old Nancy!” exclaimed John, and everyone laughed except Mrs. Wellbeloved.

Meanwhile Dick and Bessie were left out of the conversation, neither showing any perspicacity or strong feeling on the subject of Dr. Hislop’s years.

Yet Dick scarcely addressed a word to his trembling neighbor, and she found it hard work to keep back the tears at this sudden indifference, which he certainly had not led her to expect. He handed her butter three times running, but left her without bread, while her cup remained forlornly empty for a quarter of an hour under his very nose.

Worse than all, in Bessie's eyes, Dick seemed to confuse her inextricably with his Aunt Jane, addressing them both in exactly the same polite meaningless tones, as if he were not quite sure which was which, or exactly where he was.

Bessie had been looking forward to this meeting with intense yet timid joy. She had put on her best frock, curled her hair, and bought a new tucker out of the pocket-money that her uncle gave her, hoping to look her best for Dick's sake. His kindness to her on previous Saturdays, his handsome face and ringing manly voice, that could become so tender at times—all this had touched the heart of the lonely girl, accustomed during her last two years to the shrill scolding of her aunt, whom nothing could please.

Only last Saturday had not Dick in his most charming manner asked her during tea

to come for a walk by the river with him? and had he not spoken words that thrilled her and haunted her day and night for the rest of the week? Had they not floated into her dreams and made the riverside hallowed to her? Ah! it was no dream,—his arm had been round her for a bewildering second, and if they had not heard voices—! And she had opened her heart to him, told him how dearly she had loved her mother, and how terrible it had been to come from a happy home to this place, where even her uncle, who was anxious to be good to her, had to show his kindness by stealth for fear of his wife.

All these troubles had been poured into the ears of the too fascinating listener, whose good looks and charming manner had disturbed so cruelly Bessie's peace of mind.

But, alas! where were now those engaging manners?

Dick sat at his aunt's tea-table, looking as much like a skeleton at the feast as his robust and blooming appearance would permit. If from habit he did fall into his old charming ways, it was generally the undesirable Aunt Jane whom he chose for his ministrations—a singular selection indeed, for Aunt Jane never had been affable to her nephew since she unluckily chanced to hear of his having toasted herself and Sarah in a bumper of Dedborough ale at the public-house in Winterbridge. Long after the meal was over, Dick suddenly roused himself and tried to persuade his aunt to take another cup of tea.

“I have already refused three times!” said Miss Coverdale, sternly.

Bessie's eyes filled with tears. The sense of disappointment was so keen and strong, that it seemed to affect her physically: she wondered whether she would have strength

to rise from the table. What was to become of her now? Life would be unbearable!

Her uncle took John Coverdale to see his little garden, which occupied a very important post in the old man's life ; Jane and Sarah went off to meet the farmer who was to drive them back to Winterbridge, Mrs. Coverdale and Mrs. Wellbeloved remained in the parlor for a gossip, while Bessie, summoning all her resolution, rushed out of the room. Dick, having been commissioned by his father to have Nancy put into the cart, walked down to the Crown, harnessed the animal and led her to the bridge, there to await the others. Tethering Nancy to the post of the hand-rail, he flung himself on the river-bank and opened his book. He trembled with something between delight and awe. It was like meeting his own soul. Yes, yes, he had felt all this, all this —though language was denied him. Ah!

heaven, what rapture to feel so, and to have the gift of speech !

Dick plunged into his book and read on and on, with throbbing pulses, and wild up-bursts of longing and hope and slumbering power. He felt as one who has been awakened from sleep ; conscious for the first time of what was within him.

It was as if he had been in a well-filled world that was in perpetual twilight, and now the sun had risen, and he saw as well as touched everything therein, and *knew* that he touched and saw. His own wild little home among the moors, he perceived as some cultivated stranger might have perceived it ; it sank to its place in the great outer world which now seemed to take a permanent place in his consciousness, forming a majestic background to the motley images of human life.

The marvel of the self-discovery overwhelmed him.

Yes, this same Witches' Sabbath had gone on within him when he wandered over the moors and the wild country round his home; but then it was buried far down in his heart, untouched by the spell of speech. He realized now the gigantic rôle that language plays in the history of the soul.

Dick enjoyed a reputation in Winterbridge for deep learning, a reputation which made him smile sadly and bitterly. His longing for greater knowledge was to him as a gnawing hunger which he had no hope of appeasing. To be praised for his learning! How hideous an irony it seemed! Yet in a superficial manner he was at times inclined to be vain of his scholarship and to enjoy to the full the advantages it gave him.

At the public-house in Winterbridge whither a certain convivial instinct some-

times led him (and a certain instinct for mischief made him toast his supernaturally respectable aunts), he had often constituted himself leader of the revels in virtue of his acquirements; and although some of the old men were disposed to shake their heads at this new-fangled youngster who had been educated at a university, yet the very vigor and social talents of the young fellow won him a position among the frequenters of the Wheatsheaf which he held against all comers.

Dick at last laid down his book with a huge sigh, and looked round at the river and the high hills on the opposite side of the valley. At a little distance at the foot of a tree he noticed a figure which seemed to him familiar. Presently he saw the head bend down, and in the still afternoon he could catch the sound of sobbing. It was the spot on which, only a week ago, he had stood by the riverside with Bessie and thrown his arm

round her impulsively, regretting what he had done the moment after.

He felt certain now that this was Bessie, and that she was sobbing because of his neglect. Full of remorse, he sprang to his feet, slipped her rival into his pocket, and stood by her side. The girl started, coloring and trembling and trying in vain to hide her tears.

“What is the matter, Bessie?” inquired Dick in that fatally tender voice of his. “You must not cry like this: tell me what it is: has the aunt been unkind to you?”

Bessie, thrilling with the softness of his accents, instinctively prolonged the tender catechism by evasion and shyness—both being genuine, yet both exaggerated. If tears could evoke this delightful mood, Bessie was in no hurry to banish them. Yet, like waves after the wind has sunk, the sobs still shook her convulsively, but now they were only

painless relics of former perturbations. Dick, in the flood-tide of his own emotions, was ready to be carried off his feet at the sight of strong feeling in another.

As he looked at the girl at his feet, weeping, as he knew or believed, because of him, he flung himself on the grass, threw his arms round her, and drew her face towards his, imprisoning both her hands, so that she had to lie helpless with her head on his breast.

She could see the lime-tree above her and the blue sky shining through, and she wondered in that rapturous interval whether heaven could ever come near to a moment such as this. Her girlish sense of propriety disturbed even that short experience of bliss, and made her give a little struggle to rise.

“Not till you tell me what you were crying for,” said Dick.

“Let me up, let me up—I ought not to—suppose somebody were to come?”

“Then somebody would wish himself in my place.”

“Or mine,” Bessie thought, but propriety again intervened and she did not say it.

Between the bliss of her position (ah! surely it was impossible!) and the uneasiness caused by her sense of the fitting, Bessie’s feelings were overwhelming. Dick looked down admiringly at the fair hair lying in reprehensible disorder over his brown coat, at the white brow which it shaded, and the red lips parted in a tremulous smile. Not for the first time in his life, Dick fancied himself in love. The emotion that had been stirred in such copious streams by the words of the poet overflowed into a fresh channel. Again Bessie struggled to move, but he gathered her closer to him, bent his lips to her ear and whispered:

“Was it about me that you were crying, Bessie?”

She gave a faint “Yes,” blushing over cheek and brow; and then she felt his kisses on her lips, and heard his words of muttered self-reproach and murmured tenderness in her ear. With a sigh she surrendered herself to her happiness. To love and be loved was Bessie’s one idea in life. She had no ambitions, no thoughts beyond the doings and sayings of those who were dear to her. Her affections were strong and faithful, eager to pour forth after the cruel two years of uninterrupted repression which she had suffered under her uncle’s roof. The feverishness of her emotions, and the swiftness of her response to Dick’s first debonnair advances, arose from the same cause.

Dick was an ardent wooer, and Bessie felt

bewildered and almost disturbed at her own intense happiness.

Her first uneasy little impulses of reserve were overwhelmed now in the far stronger instincts of her nature.

The spell was broken by the striking of the clock from the gray church tower, among the lime-trees.

An hour had passed since they met here by the river, an hour of bliss never in one of these lives to be surpassed.

Dick heard his father's voice calling to him. Bessie instinctively remained behind the tree-trunk.

Dick took her in his arms once more, pressed a strong farewell kiss on her lips, and left her.

"Till this day week, darling!"

Bessie lay on the grassy bank alone, while the shadows lengthened round her and the hills changed in tint. The clock of the

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gray tower struck its mellow warning again before she dragged herself from the spot, and returned to receive her aunt's scolding.

CHAPTER II.

The City of Rocks.

DICK went home in a glow of emotion.

He felt as if he must shout aloud, tell everybody that he had won the love of the sweetest woman in all the country-side!

“Gee up, Nancy; gee up, my lass! Doesn’t this breeze inspire you? Now then, father, down the hill at full speed, and you’ll be half up the other side before ye know where you are!”

“D’ye want to break all our necks?” inquired the Yorkshireman slowly. “That’s the way with you youngsters. Yo leave me aloan, my lad; Nancy and me understands one another! Eh, Nancy?”

Nancy jogged on downhill, with her ridiculous tilted body swinging from side to

side, her ears put back to catch her master's tones.

When they had toiled up three or four steep hills and reached the farm lands, there were several obstructive gates to pass through, and Dick would swing down from the high cart to open them. When they were through the last one, instead of mounting again, he went off to the farmyard to make certain that everything was secure for the night.

The calm light lay over the broad-roofed barns and outhouses, over the deserted cottage by the roadside. There were many such ruined dwellings on the farm, for times were sadly changed since the Coverdales had been among the wealthier of the Niddesdale yeomen. The deserted cottage was on the road that led past the farm-house, on the same side of the way. Between the two buildings, a gate opened into a large paddock behind the house, where Mrs. Coverdale

brought up her poultry. It was studded with hen-coops, the abode of numerous promising families now retired for the night. An occasional faint "cheep," a subdued remark of a musing character from the presiding hens, might be heard as Dick passed the coops, which were carefully covered with sacking by Mrs. Coverdale.

He heard her voice calling him, and turned.

"Yer faither says ye'd better just tak' a look at the gray mare," said Mrs. Coverdale. "Johnny was tellin' him she seems a bit ailin'."

"I did take a look at her, mother; she's a little off her feed. We'll see how she is tomorrow. Has my father seen her?"

"Your faither doesna like the appearance of her. 'A wish 'a could bring the poor beast into th' hoose and see to her mysel'," added Mrs. Coverdale. "That's just the way that brown Meg went off, after her furrest foal!"

The farmer's wife was going the round of the hen-coops.

"They hawks has been takin' the young turkeys awfu' this year," she said plaintively. "Look at they feathers; that's the wee one wi' the brown speckles on his breast. That's thirirteen a've lost this spring, and May not over yet; an' what wi' the stoats an' the foxes, there soon won't be a burrd left!"

Dick proposed to wire in a bit of the pasture for the young chickens, but Mrs. Coverdale shook her head.

"Oh, it's easily done," said Dick, whose reading had enlarged his ideas of the attainable beyond all known bounds.

"The wire'd cost so much," said Mrs. Coverdale; "and, besides, I dinna see how it would answer."

"Better than losing the poultry," returned her reckless son.

But the project, when mentioned to the

farmer, met with so much discouragement that the young chickens continued to pay their tithes to the hawks and the weasels, and Mrs. Coverdale bemoaned their fate in the same plaintive and helpless manner, as if Heaven had set its face against their rescue. She was in a conversational mood this evening, and inclined to discuss with her son the affairs of the Wellbeloveds, which were not so flourishing as they had been a few years ago.

“Yon lassie’s an expense to them,” she observed, “what wi’ her clothes and a’; and her appetite’s healthy. Not that she ate much at tea,” added Mrs. Coverdale, meditatively. “Puir lassie, I doubt she finds her aunt a bit dour; she seemed scared like. Weel, she’s bonny, and I daresay she’ll be getting a husband soon; eh, Dick?” (This with a meaning glance at her son.) “But ah! Thomas ’ll miss her sorely; he’s awfu’

taken up with the mitherless bairn, and havin' nane o' his ain." Mrs. Coverdale smiled benevolently.

Dick hesitated. Should he tell his mother of his betrothal to Bessie? Why not?

He had it on his tongue more than once, but something made him hold back—a vague, unformed motive that he could not have explained, probably an instinctive sense that to announce would be to bind himself; and this idea irked him intolerably.

Mrs. Coverdale at length returned to the big, dusky parlor, where her husband was snoring in the horsehair arm-chair before the empty fireplace; the tall eight-day clock in the corner behind him solemnly recording the minutes that he dedicated to oblivion. Dick accompanied his mother to the house; begged for a chunk of bread, as he might not be in for supper; and then made his

way back through the numerous invalid animals bivouacked in the kitchen, and out of the paddock. This he traversed, crossed the stile and a by-road into another large meadow where cows were grazing. A long, gawky-looking shadow strode before him across the greensward, and the hedgerow trees, as he passed through field after field, cast similar distorted images of themselves in the glowing but declining sunlight.

The fields now rose steadily towards the heights, till finally Dick entered a picturesque patch of waste-land, trending uphill, dotted with fantastic trees, bits of copse and groups of gorse ; and further on he passed a wild tangle of undergrowth, at the foot of a high rock.

A stir in the air announced that the moorland heights were almost gained. The great rampart that crowned the hills above Braisted plunged here into the soil, and

about its foot sprang wild, self-sown growths of mountain-ash and birch, seedling ash-trees and oaks with young foliage shining ruby-red.

Dick clambered up the steep ascent, along a rough, winding track, and presently found himself standing, with the wind in his face, on the high eastern verge of the "Rocks," looking over an immense expanse of country across Niddesdale to the opposite hills, which were growing deeper and deeper purple with the increasing splendor of the sunset.

Beside him to westward lay a confused mass of rocks, some of them close enough together to allow a nimble person to jump from one to another, here and there separated by large clefts and spaces. Everywhere the bilberry-bushes surged up like an emerald sea among the gray boulders.

Dick could see across the country to the

valley where Dedborough lay, at the foot of its little protecting hill. The town was not visible, but Dick's practised eye detected its position, and he tried to picture Bessie in the dull little parlor with her aunt and uncle, her thoughts straying across the hills to Braisted, as the lover knew. Again, for the hundredth time, he re-acted in imagination the afternoon's experience.

His leading thought was how to make her happy, how to satisfy the claims of her affection: for he felt instinctively that with her to love was to claim, not peremptorily but pathetically, and therefore, from a nature like Dick's, almost irresistibly.

How to make her happy? He felt vaguely disturbed as the question haunted him. His eye wandered from the shut-in little town, sheltered and still, where Bessie passed her days, to the great expanse of hill and dale stretching from east to west, with

the bounding moors to northward, and the sweeping wild lines of the clouds above the western ranges. The contrast had for him an ominous significance. His hand sought the volume of poems in his breast-pocket, but not to draw it forth. He sank down on the rocky ledge where he stood, at the foot of a boulder (a rabbit scudded away into a cleft as he did so), and resting his head on his hand, he looked out over the landscape in a tumult of confused feeling.

A sense of vast happiness was crossed with currents of longing, as the sensuous element strangely mixed with the loftiest aspirations, shifting, like the colors in sunlit water, to greedy but transitory grasping of worldly ambition, when, for a base clear-visioned moment, he saw Bessie as a hopeless obstacle to his career. The color surged into his cheeks with disgust and shame.

Then there swept over him a gust of passion, not for Bessie, not for anything human, but a passion for life,—for the earth on which he stood, for the sky which spread its canopy over him, for the hills and the fields; for the ivy at his side, that was breaking into young, green leaves on the rock-face; for the tiny herbs that crept between the crevices and the mosses and lichen, painting it with green and brown; for the golden gorse that sent up whiffs of warm fragrance into his nostrils, and for the great upgrowth of heather that swept over the moors behind the rocks in unbroken line to the horizon. He rose impetuously and plunged across the boulders, from one to another, with an occasional leap over a miniature chasm, through the bilberry bushes, across the open spaces of grass, and on towards the mysterious castellated groups of rocks, about which gruesome stories were

told of human sacrifice in the days of the Druids.

The light was dying over the moors ; the clouds banking up to westward were turning gray and black. A look of mystery and gloom crept over the place ; the dying wind stirred stealthily among the crevices ; every shadow seemed to conceal a secret. Ahead stood the great rocks, looking in the twilight like some deserted Cyclopean city.

Dick continued to leap across the boulders till he came to the open sweep of bilberry-covered moor, rising steeply towards a hill to the west, and to northward leading to a bare tract of high land, where a lonely farmstead stood unsheltered. Keeping on the downward slope of the land, Dick found himself among the gloomy by-ways of the "City of Rocks," whose walls and towers rose above him threateningly. Some wild

bird was uttering a shrill note far away among the heather.

Dick sat down on the narrow ledge of the rampart, at the outlet of a narrow defile between two upright boulders, which showed signs on their water-marked faces of an existence centuries ago passed on the sea-shore. Upon these cliffs the waves had beaten perhaps for ages, where now the beech-trees swayed against them in more gentle fashion—perhaps for ages to come. Dick was sitting with his head against the rock, his foot pressed against the side of the niche, and his hands flung behind his neck. The scene, awful in its grandeur, was working upon his mind so strangely that he felt afraid of his own impressions. His personality shrank away shivering, as if it dared not face the Infinite in Time and Space that haunted the darkness and the silence of this moorland city.

The black stillness was appalling. It seemed to put all human hopes to shame. The fragmentary scraps of religious faith that had been real factors of conduct (astonishingly few are these factors among even the most devout) came piteously pleading, swaying like reeds in the wind of the new thought. They fought hard for life, lifting their heads again and again after the blast of Doubt had swept by; but they were unprepared for the fierce encounter, accustomed only to tender handling and a sheltered existence under the shadow of sleepy creeds and dogmas unassailed. They quailed and sank. There were strange low sounds in the air, as if a host of demons laughed them to scorn. The great black gulf that lay there in ghastly silence, cold, indifferent absolute, seemed but a type of the Abyss of Mystery on whose verge we laugh and love, and weep and—die.

The Dance of Life seemed so piteous a thing, with all its fantastic figures, its grace, its stateliness, its reckless gayety, its infinite variety, if the last step—be it slow and halting, be it swift and merry—plunged the dancer forever into the fathomless Darkness. All that was warm and living, all powers newly awakened with their thrilling prophecies, turned sick at the thought. Yet there was no looking back; the tattered shreds of a creed that had long ago ceased to rule the life or the philosophy, offered no warmth or shelter.

The Ambassadors of Faith went away unsatisfied.

“ He wanders, like a day-appearing dream,
Through the dim wilderness of the mind ;
Through desert-woods and tracts, which seem
like ocean,
Homeless, boundless, unconfined.”

The stillness was broken at last by the

patter of rain on the beech-trees at the foot of the cliffs, and on the slender little mountain-ash that grew out of a crevice close by. The rock received the accustomed onslaught in silent stoicism. The niche in which Dick sat was roofed over by a slab, and he remained where he was, dry and secure. The rain increased rapidly, and presently it was pouring down out of the black clouds in straight, determined streams, made sharply visible by an occasional gleam of summer lightning.

Dick drew a deep breath as it pelted down with hiss and clamor, as he heard the thirsty soil drinking it up, the gurgling and bubbling, the rush and tumult of the watery festival.

The woods and hills and the little streams were in high revel, quaffing to one another in the heavenly vintage; the brook just below was singing a rollicking drinking-song,

and the old Earth grew drunk and merry.

Glad would be the heart of the farmer at sight of these timely floods! No anxiety now about his hay-crop. This made all safe, thank Heaven! The old man would be standing at his door watching the downpour, as his fathers had stood for generations. Perhaps ancestral influences were at work in the joy which the rain inspired, in the subtle sympathy with the soil and its growths, which had become in the farmer's son little short of a passion.

Presently he started up to listen to a sound other than that of the rain, that smote on his ear. He fancied he heard the breaking of a branch and the rattling of a stone, as if it had been dislodged and fallen down a rough slope, knocking against other stones on its way. He knew the sound so well in his own wanderings. He

went a few steps through the defile that led to his niche, and then he heard the tread of a footstep—whether human or not, he was unable to guess. Probably some sheep, or one of the horses belonging to the little farm-house below the rocks, had strayed from its paddock. The footsteps approached slowly, moving up towards the twin-boulders which formed the defile and niche.

“Who’s there?” Dick called out.

There was a sudden, low, sharp cry of fear or astonishment, and then a pause, during which the rain made a continuous roar all round.

“Don’t be alarmed!” he called out to the unknown one.

He went through the defile, and became aware of a woman’s form leaning against the side of a big stone which was half-smothered by bilberry bushes. She seemed

to be tall and stoutly built, with a certain air that suggested habitual self-possession, in spite of the fact that she was at the present moment overcome by fatigue or alarm. There was something well-finished and delicate about her appearance, notwithstanding its robustness, that could be detected in the half-light.

“You will be drenched, out in this rain,” said Dick, wondering how to inspire her with confidence. “There is a little corner through here where you will be entirely sheltered, if you will let me show it you.”

“Thank you; you are very kind, but I think I ought to try to get home.”

The soft, cultivated voice was still rather tremulous.

“Let me show you the place; I have been there all through the storm, and I am as dry as a hayrick.”

Dick could see that the young woman

was looking at him searchingly, as if wondering whether she might trust him.

“My name is Coverdale; perhaps you may have heard it? My father has the farm yonder, about two miles from here across the fields.”

“Oh, I have heard the name often! Thank you; I shall be greatly obliged to you if you will show me that place you speak of.”

“This way. Can you get over the hillock there? That’s right—now along this sheep-track: if you give me your hand, and that thing you are carrying, I can help you along. I know the path as well in the dusk as at mid-day.”

She held out a long, rather thin, capable-looking hand, and placed it in Dick’s large and horny one. Although it trembled slightly, she seemed to have no distrust of her companion, who led her along the path

to the defile. She stopped then with a comic air of dismay.

“Do you mean to tell me I have to get through there?”

“It’s not so narrow as it looks,” said Dick, with one of his beaming smiles.

That smile seemed to give the last touch to her growing confidence. She became cheerful and friendly at once.

“If I remain wedged between the rocks, Mr. Coverdale,” she said, “my blood will be upon your head!”

“No fear,” he answered.

The transit was safely achieved, and the new comer uttered an exclamation of pleasure when she saw the cosy nook entirely sheltered and furnished by her companion with a carpet of dried fern-leaves.

“This is delicious! But please don’t trouble any more; I am supremely comfortable.”

“Your cloak is wet through,” said Dick, proud of his position as knight to a distressed dame: “if you will—if you wouldn’t mind having my coat?” he stammered.

“Oh no—no!” she said quickly, “that would be madness on your part. I will take off my wet cloak, and then I shall be all right. It is a warm night, though one can’t deny that it rains a little.”

The deafening roar all round made them smile at one another in a manner that struck them immediately afterwards as surprisingly intimate, considering the date of their acquaintance.

“I had come up to the moors to sketch,” she explained, “and lost my way. I am staying at the inn in Winterbridge. I suppose you don’t know of any lodgings to be had there, do you? The inn is not very comfortable. The sunset to-night was so fine that I forgot to watch the hour, and it

grew dusk, and I got confused among these innumerable boulders and found myself walking over precipices; and then the rain began, and I came up here thinking to get shelter. I was feeling very nervous. Your moors, Mr. Coverdale, are eerie places at dusk; and I was thinking of all the horrid stories I had heard, and devoutly hoping I should meet nobody, when suddenly, quite close to me, I heard your voice. It was a bad moment, I assure you!"

Dick looked at her in surprise. She was so unlike a person whom one would expect to be easily moved by indefinable terrors. He said that he was very sorry he had startled her, and then sank into silence. He felt not quite at ease. His quick nerves or instinct made him suspect that his companion was regarding him as an honest young bumpkin whom she might patronize, though she was too cultivated and clever to mark

any patronage in her manner. Dick, with the consciousness within him of a wide mental outlook and large uncouth powers, had a sense that he was in a false position, a vague resentment at being treated with interested indulgence, well-veiled though it might be.

His unwilling admiration made the relations that were springing up between himself and the new comer the more annoying, especially as he found himself adopting—with a fatal facility that besets natures of this order—the rôle she had assigned him, answering as accurately to her expectations as an electric needle to the dominant current.

She had fashioned for him (as we all do as soon as we are confronted with a new personality) an imaginary mental form, which he saw floating before him like an abhorred ghost in the darkness; and this

form he had to enter and to feel closing round him as a sheath, while recognizing irefully that he had himself taken part in his imprisonment. In the course of a not very brisk conversation, his new acquaintance informed him that her name was Margaret Ellwood, that her husband was dead, and that she was now supporting herself by her brush. She had come to Yorkshire to do some sketching on the moors.

“I can’t afford to be idle,” she said; “yet health is almost as important as bread, so I try to win the two at the same time.”

“Then you sell your pictures!” Dick exclaimed.

“Does that surprise you so much?”

“Well, I thought you looked more like one who does things for amusement,” said Dick, still resentful of his incarceration.

Mrs. Ellwood smiled.

“What makes you think so?”

“It seemed to me that you were one of the idle sort, that’s all!” he returned, acting up to his bumpkin rôle in a vengeful spirit.

“Well, really, Mr. Coverdale, you are rather severe,” she said with a laugh. “If you knew what a hard-working life I lead, and how I am at this moment completely tired out, perhaps you would treat my efforts with a little more respect. It isn’t only people with spades and pickaxes who work, you know.”

Dick looked at her more carefully, but in the dim light he could not detect the weary look in her eyes, or the too great pallor of her cheeks and lips. Her robustness of outline, and a certain energy in her manner, gave a true impression of native strength, but disguised the signs of overstrain. She had fine limpid gray-blue eyes, that looked out straight and clear, inspiring trust; her hair was of a light reddish brown, very

smooth and luxuriant. The features were irregular, the brow broad, the lips full. The eyes gave an expression of gravity to the face.

This type of woman was entirely unfamiliar to the farmer's son. He felt clumsy and uncouth beside her, yet she attracted him. The rain still poured down, threatening to prolong the singular interview indefinitely. Mrs. Ellwood endeavored to draw her companion into conversation, not knowing that she was trying in vain to make him emerge from the species of cocoon in which she herself had unconsciously enwoven him.

"I want to understand where you live," she said. "I should so much like to see a real Yorkshire farm. I wonder if I might come up some day from Winterbridge?"

"Why, yes, of course; and we can give you a cup of tea, and I'll show you what there is to see. It's not much. Times are

bad, and my father has been obliged to let some of the cottages and buildings go to ruin about the place, and it makes it look desolate."

"But you are fond of it, I suppose?" suggested Mrs. Ellwood, wondering how a Yorkshireman born and bred regarded the spot that seemed to her so full of poetry.

At that question, Dick's real self, escaping the vigilance of the cocoon, made a triumphant sortie.

Mrs. Ellwood looked up admiringly as he drew himself together, and stood with one hand pressed hard against the rock as he leaned forward. She longed to sketch the fine easy lines of his figure, and the firmness and swing of the pose. She had scarcely realized before how handsome he was. She was so much occupied in studying his face, with a view to portraiture, that she did not

notice what he was saying. He must have been speaking several seconds when her mind drifted into the current of his thoughts at haphazard.

“—there isn’t an inch of ground between here and Braisted that I don’t love with every fibre of my body! It’s got to be part of myself. Our people have been here for generations, and I feel as if I were made out of the soil, just as the grass is and the heather. When the rain falls, it is as if it fell on me, and when the sun shines, it is as if it shone on me. We’re simple folk hereabout—so, I suppose, we seem to you, who have seen so much, and done so much that is unknown to us,—but we have things in our life that you can’t have—you who live in towns, torn away from the earth.” He clasped the rock with his hand as he spoke with a gust of passion.

Mrs. Ellwood’s expression had changed

from one of observant criticism to a look of keen interest.

“It has always been one of my regrets that I have known the country so little,” she said gently.

“One can't have everything, I suppose,” returned the young man with a greedy sigh, “more's the pity! But my heart is sore for all who have not known the friendship of these things.”

“I suppose, then, nothing would induce you to leave your native place?”

Dick took his hand from the rock, and swung his figure round, his head sinking suddenly on his breast.

“It's strange that you should ask me that question,” he said, after a pause: “it's one I've been asking myself in secret this two years and more. It seems as if there were two men inside this body of mine—one that has got roots in the soil, the other with

wings. And the fellow with wings has been troubling lately. His brother has the best of it; for it's easy to stay, and hard to go."

"I suppose your parents are loath to part with you?"

"Ay; I am their eldest son, and they trust to me to look after things. Times are hard now: my father lost more than half his stock last year, and he worries over it sorely. There are two young boys to bring up besides me. My mother works hard from dawn till dusk; if it were not for her, my father often says he couldn't keep head above water. She likes to think that I shall have the farm after they are gone, and she struggles to hold things together for my sake as well as for my father's. They both fix their thoughts on me. They are as good parents as ever a man had; and yet"—Dick paused for a second—"something beyond those hills seems to call to me

unceasingly, and I feel at times that I must go !”

He gave a sigh, as if it had relieved him to confess himself. It did not occur to him that since he was a little boy, telling his troubles at his mother's knee, this was the first time that he had spoken openly to anyone.

He had an unaccountable sense of having known this woman all his life. Her sympathy was so penetrating, that he could feel it around him, as if it were something palpable, while she sat there listening in silence. He had no doubts. He knew that there was nothing in her to prevent his unquestioning confidence. Her influence was greater and more subtle even than this. Her mere presence soothed and gave hope and strength. To see her sitting there in her calm attitude, was to be rescued for a time from the sense of profound solitude that had haunted him from his childhood.

And yet—even yet—there was one lonely, darksome corner that her sunshine could not reach!

“You have read a good deal, have you not? and thought?” Mrs. Ellwood said presently.

Dick laughed.

“In my father’s little library are *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, *Baxter’s Saints’ Rest*, *The Book of Martyrs*, a copy of Shakespeare, an old volume of Charles Lamb, Gibbon, and a good many others less noteworthy. A shop in Dedborough that I haunt has also supplied me with books, sometimes worthless, sometimes—like this.”

Dick was on his knees before his new friend, and had placed the precious volume in her hand.

“Shelley!” she exclaimed. “Had you never come across him before?”

“No, only read of him. It seems to me

as if all the joy of my life were crowding into one day! I found this book this afternoon,—this evening I”—he hesitated—“I won a true heart—and to-night—”

“To-night?” she prompted with a warm smile, almost as one would give to a child, yet full of a tender reverence that in this woman was ever ready to go forth towards all true and aspiring spirits.

“To-night I have found you!”

“Ah! and a very valuable discovery!” she said with a gentle laugh.

“You will not withdraw yourself after we part?” he pleaded wistfully. “You will let me see you again?”

“By all means, she answered. “I want to know a great deal more about you. Will you tell me?”

Dick gave an expressive gesture:

“Will a flower open when the sunshine falls upon it?”

She smiled.

“I may be able to help you in some way,” she said, musingly. “I have books with me that you may like to see, and—do you take any interest in painting?”

“I have seen no pictures,” he answered, “except once at Leeds, and those I did not care for; but when I see the sun setting over the hills, or a brook running to join the river, or the cattle coming home in the glow of the evening to be milked, my mother going and coming among her fowls, then I feel—”

“That you must express or represent it in some form or other.”

“Yes, or—go mad,” said Dick quietly. (Mrs. Elwood looked up suddenly.) “I cannot be content to let things alone—(I can’t explain quite)—I must translate them, carry them into a new realm.”

“The realm of Art,” said Mrs. Ellwood.

“So you, too, have that strange insanity! Do you know, you have beguiled me into forgetting all about the weather. I think the rain sounds less determined.”

But Dick seemed inclined to underrate the improvement.

“It’s still very heavy; I can’t let you risk going yet. Do go on talking.”

Mrs. Ellwood laughed.

“I am glad you find me so entertaining; but I must really be going.”

“She had risen, and was standing on the verge of the rock, holding out her hand to catch the drops.

“A mere summer shower,” she said. “It will be quite refreshing.”

CHAPTER III.

The Misses Coverdale's Spare Bedroom.

RELUCTANTLY Dick followed his new acquaintance through the defile, and out among the wet bushes, which sent flying huge drops as they bent back after her passing. Dick led his charge through the wild suburbs of the city, across its grassy piazzas, and along its wet green streets, downwards to the wide and majestic entry, where an ancient river had flower into the sea. At its mouth a farm-house now stood, and beyond, where the waters had played and stormed, the quiet fields sloped towards Braisted.

Mrs. Ellwood had no difficulty in persuading Dick to tell her more about his life and

his surroundings. She listened to him in amazement. The picture that he drew had all the qualities of a work of art. The critical faculty in her made her appreciation as delicate and perfect as his unconscious masterpiece.

“I must try to find rooms in Winter-bridge!” she exclaimed.

An idea struck Dick: perhaps his aunts might be glad to add to their small income by letting their spare room.

“Let us go and try at once,” cried Mrs. Ellwood.

Dick described his aunts, and warned her that they would require careful management.

It was past nine o'clock when he and his companion passed through the village street, and stopped at the door of a little red-brick house with clean white blinds. A cautious hand pulled aside the blind on the ground-floor, and then Miss Sarah Coverdale ap-

peared at the door, with her strange red face, her hair more startlingly dragged back, her Alpine nose more prominent than ever.

“This lady,” said Dick, “is trying to find rooms in Winterbridge, and I thought perhaps you might know of some.”

Miss Coverdale’s air was reserved and dignified, though her nephew could detect a gleam of eagerness in her pale eyes. She stood, nevertheless, keeping careful guard over the door, holding it very slightly open, and filling up the space with her meagre person. No, she did not know of any rooms; she did not think that any person in Winterbridge let rooms; she had never heard of such a thing, and evidently did not associate with people capable of so far forgetting themselves.

Mrs. Ellwood was discouraged, but Dick made a sign to persevere.

“I only want a small sitting-room and bed-

room for a week or two. I am doing some sketching in this neighborhood."

Miss Coverdale looked suspiciously at the stranger.

"My sister may know of something," she said, retiring in an undecided manner, opening the door a little wider, as if half inviting them to enter, but not liking to embark on such a venture without the support of Jane.

That damsel had rushed upstairs on seeing the stranger, to attire herself. She presently appeared in black silk, trimmed with beaded gimp, laid on in a majestic square upon the chest, and finished with some dangling fringe which trembled in response to every emotion of that virtuous breast.

Jane was more gracious than her sister; probably feeling that, in such attire, one could sustain one's dignity on easier terms. She made many inquiries as to the rooms that were wanted, about the amount that the

lodger would be willing to pay, and then she relaxed a little in her custody of the door.

“It is very strange that you should happen to come to-day, for my sister and I were just saying only this morning how nice it would be if we could have our spare room filled; for the sake of the company, of course—nothing more.”

“Oh! nothing more—and might I, perhaps, see the rooms?”

The small parlor, with its slim alabaster jug from whose mouth poured a torrent of wax flowers, was exactly what Mrs. Ellwood required. The sisters were pleased to observe that her eyes were attracted by a print of the Queen and Prince Albert, representing the pair in the midst of a swarming progeny, with a bassinet beside the throne containing an exceedingly amiable royal baby who toyed pleasantly with a costly rattle.

“Yes, that’s a picture that used to belong to my poor father,” said Miss Coverdale. “He left us this little place, though it’s not, of course, what we have been accustomed to; but when there’s a large family, it’s not the same thing, as one may say.”

“Not at all,” assented Mrs. Ellwood. “And about the other room?”

The other room was more remarkable. Over the mantelpiece hung a brilliantly-illuminated text on a very gigantic scale—*GOD IS LOVE!* Over the washing-stand lesser honor had been paid to the opening sentence of the Lord’s Prayer. The gilding of the capitals, although those occurred with reckless prodigality, was laid on with more restraint, and the letters themselves were not so amazingly large as in the dominant work of art.

Mrs. Ellwood was just turning away, when her eye caught the counterpane. The

sisters smiled with gentle pride. It was made of some knitted texture, and divided into squares, on each of which was worked a short biblical text or religious precept: "*I am the Good Shepherd*"—"Lazarus, come forth"—"*I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life*"—"Come to Jesus"—"*Consider your Transgressions,*"—and so forth. Occasionally a saying had been cut in half, through the exigencies of the embroidery, so that some of the squares contained fragments like "*Verily, verily, I say unto you*"—"but what went ye out for to see?"

"Is this your work?" Mrs. Ellwood asked.

"Yes," said Miss Coverdale, modestly; "my sister and I did it together. We like to keep religious Truth always before us—it's nice employment for the winter evenings."

"It must indeed be so," said the artist, as she retraced her steps to the parlor.

“I like the rooms very much; do you feel disposed to break through your usual custom, and accept me as a lodger?”

Miss Coverdale supported her cheek on her hand, and seemed lost in thought.

“You see, it’s a thing we are not used to—that makes it so very awkward. I must see what my sister says about it.”

Miss Sarah was discovered in the dining-room, knitting counterpane squares for future embroidery. The consultation struck out no sparks of new light: Sarah seemed to rely on Jane’s judgment, and Jane was loath to come to any decision without more definite indications from Sarah. However, as Mrs. Ellwood was so uncomfortable at the hotel, they would not object to make the concession.

“It’s not that we need to let the rooms,” Miss Jane once more explained, “but we want a little company, that’s the truth. It

does get quiet at times—there's so little society in the village that one can mix with."

"So the matter was settled; and Mrs. Ellwood rejoined Dick, who was waiting for her outside.

"Your aunts seem rather remarkable ladies," she observed, wishing to see in what light they appealed to him.

"Fools!" he exclaimed, with so much fervor that Mrs. Ellwood burst out laughing. "I suppose they have been pretending that they are quite independent of—"

"Oh yes! I am in the position of guest, with the trifling difference that I am to pay."

"How can they be such idiots!" the young fellow exclaimed, coloring.

"Poor souls! they have few interests,—nothing to occupy them but their own dignity. I confess they amuse me some-

what, but I am sorry for them—intensely sorry!”

“I never thought of that,” said Dick.

“That’s partly because you are a man; a woman feels rather than sees in another woman the ravages of disappointment and weariness and wasted powers.”

“Wasted powers! My aunts’ wasted powers!”

“Who can say how many?”

“How wonderful you are!”

They walked on through the dusk, each wrapped in thought.

“I may see you to-morrow?” Dick asked anxiously when they stopped at the door of the inn.

Warm and gentle was the smile with which Mrs. Ellwood gave her permission.

For several seconds he remained standing on the spot where she had left him; then he roused himself with a start and wended

his way up the steep road leading to the farm. Till late he wandered among the fields and the wild lanes, by little woodland by-ways that he loved.

He could not realize what had happened to him. His life before this day seemed to fade into the semblance of a dream. It was thin and without substance.

Heavens! how large the world was! And he had seen nothing—done nothing. He was a mere weed growing on one spot, sprung there by chance—staying there by chance.

He had felt this a hundred times before, but never before had it seemed so intolerable to him. Had he followed his impulse, he would have risen from the fallen tree on which he was sitting and walked away and away into the night! Yet he was powerfully held back by another motive,—the desire to see more of Mrs. Ellwood. Her face, with

its large truthful eyes, floated before him. He sprang up and began to walk rapidly through the wood, cursing the hours that must pass before morning should bring the promised meeting on the moors. It seemed impossible to go back to the farm to-night; he could have wandered on through all the hours till dawn, and thought them only as many minutes. Yet the dull drag of duty at last moved him homewards. Habit, as well as affection, prompted him to spare anxiety to his parents.

Mrs. Coverdale met him on the threshold with a fine young turkey in her arms, which was suffering from gapes.

"You're late, Dick," she said. "I thought yo'd ha' been drenched. The Lord be praised for the rain: it has saved the hay!"

"Amen!" said Dick, and in a few words he explained where he had obtained shelter, not mentioning his new friend.

“I’ve been feeling a bit anxious about your father,” said Mrs. Coverdale, leaning against the lintel, and affectionately smoothing down her turkey: “he’s been talkin’ a deal about religion to-night, and his will; and he seems anxious about getting you settled in life; and then his head’s been bad. I doubt he’s a bit worried.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, mother,” said Dick, “but I think you’re a little over-anxious. This business about the hay has been trying, and the cattle dying and so on; but now that it’s all safe for the present, my father will soon get up his spirits again, you’ll see.”

To Dick’s surprise, Mrs. Coverdale, in spite of her usual theory about the danger of the night air, strolled out of the house; evidently something was on her mind.

“To tell you the truth,” said the farmer’s wife, “your father’s set his heart upon—”

“Upon what, mother?” asked Dick, seeing that she hesitated.

“It’s a strange thing,” said Mrs. Coverdale, “for the lassie’s nae sae rich, but he’s just taken a fancy to her, an’ nothing ’ull please him now, but that you should make a match of it—you and she; he wants to see yer settled before he dies, and the bairns springing up round ye.”

Dick cleared his throat.

“I wonder what put that idea into his head?” said he, a little hoarsely.

Mrs. Coverdale laughed.

“What but your ain goings on?” she asked. “You don’t suppose we notice nothing. The lassie’s face tells tales.”

Was it only this afternoon that he held her in his arms, murmuring vows and breathing words of ecstatic tenderness—only this afternoon, or in some previous life which he had passed on another plane of being?

“You’ll be glad that there’ll be nae opposition,” said Mrs. Coverdale, looking up in slight surprise at Dick’s silence. “Your faither was speaking to Thomas this afternoon, and he gave him to understand that if the match did come off, Bessie shouldna come to ye empty-handed.”

Dick murmured some vague words and proposed to return to the house.

“I’ll just go in and tell your faither that you’re weel-pleased about it,” said Mrs. Coverdale, as she bade him good-night.

Dick laid his hand upon her arm:

“Not just yet, mother,” he said; “I would rather think over it a little more.”

His mother gazed at him in astonishment.

“Think over it. Why, we thought ye’d set yer heart upon the lassie. You’ve not been playing fast and loose with her, Dick, I hope—an’ if you have, the more reason for

making amends now. Oh, these lads, these lads!"

Dick kissed her hastily and broke away, begging her not to say anything to his father to-night. He strode up the narrow staircase to his room, flung open the window to let the air come in upon his brow. His heart was beating quickly; his head felt full, almost to bursting.

Marry Bessie, settle down for life into a little circle of homely interests, narrow duties, small affections, each with its series of tethering claims! God in heaven! He would rather die. To make love was one thing, but to marry! That meant to drop the romance out of life, to say to Fate submissively: "I have had my little flight, and chirped my little song, now clip my wings and cage me as thou wilt."

Bessie! poor, gentle, loving little Bessie! How well he knew the hopes she cherished:

of quiet cares of home and children. It was impossible—impossible! He would grow to hate her, and her affection and her plaintive reproaches; for she would soon come to reproach him. He knew it. In his path she would lie, pleading, clinging, exasperating him with her weakness, her pathos, her rights, and the silent evidence of his own ill-doing. He saw her in imagination in her little circle, dreaming of him, longing for him, and for a moment he felt a sort of rage possess him, as if he could have strangled that love of hers, which was bidding fair to strangle what was sweetest in his own life.

In spite of this fierce and sudden revulsion of feeling, it did not seriously occur to him that his marriage could be avoided; it was indeed because he felt himself so bound, that all the newly-roused impulses were set in storm. He had not actually asked Bessie

to be his wife; he had not even the thought of it, when he was moved by her tears and her beauty to say what he meant, perhaps, only for the moment; but, in the code of Dedborough—nay, in his own unconsidered code, he was bound to her now in honor.

He did not attempt to go to bed. That night Hope died, and he had to accustom himself, as best he might, to the thought of its interment.

“You have erred, and you must suffer. You have promised, and you must fulfil. If you have had visions, so have others before you, and they had to fade. The work of the world has to be done. You must do as your fathers have done before you, and for that you must marry a simple wife, who will hold you to your life’s end with a force greater than hunger or thirst, or ambition, or hope, or genius itself.”

He could not school himself, try as he

would, to rekindle his love for Bessie. He felt possibilities of passion within him—vague, vast longings wherein Bessie had no part. All she was to banish on marrying him was still undefined, still beyond the range of compact phrasing.

Had his father asked him the reason of his objections, he felt that he should have no answer; it was like the light of a summer day, the song of the lark in the highest heavens.

When the morning came, he went forth to his lighter Sunday work at the usual hour with a heavy heart. Never had the toil seemed so irksome to him.

He looked back through a vista of days, and like a long line of narrowing perspective, saw the same picture, the same toil; and before him another more terrible line, reaching far away, in tints ever duller, to the horizon of his life.

He tried to drown his thoughts with harder work, but his brain seemed to teem with images and fancies, vivid as the hues of dawn.

CHAPTER IV.

Complications.

FAR away among the mists of the valley Dedborough lay, still drowsy; and there Bessie, after a night sleepless with happiness, sat at her window, looking towards the hills and welcoming the coming of a new day.

Gladly, had she dared, would she have tramped the steep twelve miles to Braisted; but fear of her aunt, and still more her shyness, held her back. She went through the business of the day in a dream, causing Mrs. Wellbeloved's temper to boil over, even more often than usual.

Bessie had forgotten to put tea into the teapot, so that her aunt poured out a cup of

steaming hot water at breakfast time: she forgot the clean tablecloth, although it was Sunday morning: she absently sat down on the cat, and neglected to feed the canary: yet when Mrs. Wellbeloved expressed her opinion on these lapses, Bessie's face would break into an uncontrollable smile, as if her aunt had been using terms of endearment or praise.

If only Saturday would come round again! Surely Dick would walk over or write before then.

After much hesitation, Bessie wrote him a little letter, which she furtively ran out to post with her own hands. While she was penning this letter, Dick was wending his way to the moors to meet Mrs. Ellwood. He scarcely knew what he felt as he lessened the distance between them, but the crazy hopes that he had laid to their rest in the darkness of the preceding night rose

again in an unmanageable multitude, like dead men from their graves. Dead hopes were they, without the glow and health of the day that had passed.

Mrs. Ellwood sat sketching the farmhouse at the foot of the rocks, on an open bit of ground beyond the stream. She wore a cotton dress, and a large shady hat bright with wild flowers. Her voice came across the stream in friendly welcome, but it sounded to Dick as if an angel called to him from the other side of an eternity.

“Good-morning!” she said, and her tones had that round sweetness of voices, sounding through spaces of air and sunlight. “So glad you were able to come. I have been having a delightful hour’s work; it will be a charming refreshment to look at this sketch when I am in town. This place is so restful, I almost feel as if I should like to live here for ever.”

Dick's heart gave a leap.

"You look tired," said Mrs. Ellwood, surprised at the strained, almost scared expression in his eyes. "Did you not sleep well last night?"

Dick shook his head.

"How was that? What was the matter? I thought it was one of Nature's rewards for living close to her, to sleep well."

"So it is, but I was thinking," said Dick.

"Thinking: what, all night?"

Again he bowed his head. He was standing before her, cross-armed; with his foot he moved a stone to and fro restlessly. Mrs. Ellwood, who had been adding a stroke to her work here and there, now abandoned it, and looked up in the young man's face.

"What is it?" she said. "Tell me."

His lips quivered and he remained silent.

"There is something troubling you very

seriously ; perhaps I could help you, if you would only tell me."

Then he flung himself on the ground at her feet.

"I'm a fool!" he said, vehemently,—“a vain, miserable fool!"

Mrs. Ellwood gave a little sympathetic exclamation, at which the hot tears came suddenly into the young man's eyes, and he turned away in anger at his weakness.

"You ought to tell someone of your difficulty," said Mrs. Ellwood. "I'm as much surprised as grieved to hear of it, for did you not tell me only yesterday that you had won the heart you desired? I thought," Mrs. Ellwood added with a smile, "that in such a case lovers were usually happy."

"What will you think of me?" Dick exclaimed miserably. "It is because of that I am wretched. I have been a fool,—a pretty face has always played the devil with

me. I have behaved villainously. I never wanted to marry, but that's what the folk here think love-making ought to lead to!" Dick continued, abstractedly.

Mrs. Ellwood laughed softly.

"That is an unreasonable prejudice that one can't eradicate," she said. "And so you have been love-making without any thought of the sequel! No wonder you have landed yourself in difficulties. Do you care for the girl—or is it girls?" she added.

"Oh! it's not the first time," Dick admitted shamefacedly: "but before, the girls meant no more than I did; but this time she expects church-bells, wedding-ring, silk gown and all the rest of it. And my parents want it, and her uncle and aunt—there is no escape. I must go through with it."

Mrs. Ellwood shook her head.

"This won't do at all," she said; "you

must not marry in that Spartan spirit. In her name, I protest!"

Dick held his breath from sheer surprise.

"But everyone hereabouts would say that I had behaved shamefully, if I did not marry her now. You should have heard what was said about a man who did the same thing last year to the baker's daughter in Winter-bridge. She was fond of the man, and when he went away she fell ill, and everyone thought she would have died, poor lass! And do you know that Aunt Sarah has become what she is for exactly the same reason?" Dick shook his head. "I fear that Bessie cares for me more than I deserve."

"That is very likely; but she'll get over it, never fear," said Mrs. Ellwood. "You must not marry her unless you love her. If that's not taught in the Church Catechism, I am sure it was an accidental omission!"

Dick's face was changing like an April morning. Sometimes a ray of hope brightened it, but more often it was overshadowed and sad.

"I know it is all so unreasonable," he said; "I can see it with other people's eyes, as clearly as with my own. Why should I not be glad to marry the woman I have won—the prettiest and the sweetest in the dale?"

"I'm sure I don't know," Mrs. Ellwood answered dryly.

"One who would make any man a good wife," added Dick, in a tone of remonstrance, addressed apparently to the old brown horse who was cropping the grass and snorting pleasantly by the stream-side.

"Any man except you," said Mrs. Ellwood, briskly. "Now, do you think you have a right to monopolize that good wife, while causing her qualities as such to be null and void?"

Dick looked disturbed.

"But what can I do?"

"I admit that is not so easy," said the artist; "but if you recognize quite clearly that to marry her in this frame of mind is to do her a grievous wrong, you'll get out of your tangle considerably sooner than if you found no beginning or end at all, and attempted to unravel matters from the centre."

"I'm sure you're right," said Dick; "but if you knew her, you would see how impossible it would be to wound her deliberately. And this would not be the first time, poor lass! It seems such a dastardly thing to do!"

"But you could not marry her at present, in any case?" Mrs. Ellwood said, after a long pause.

"Yes; my father would put us in the old foreman's house, which has been allowed to go into decay. It's just a stone's-throw from

the farm. There's no difficulty; everything is smooth and straight and reasonable except me, and I'm like a crabbed and crooked stick that will fit into no straight hole; and no curved one either, for that matter, for the curves don't run together."

"When are you likely to see this girl again? What is her name?" asked Mrs. Ellwood.

"Bessie Saunders. She expects me on Saturday: we always go into Dedborough to market."

"Heavens! but she'll expect you before that?"

"She knows I have my work," said Dick dubiously.

Mrs. Ellwood was biting the end of her brush, in deep thought. Dick lay at her feet, his dark eyes upturned, watching her. Her abstracted air presently changed, as if she had become conscious of his steady gaze.

She moved her eyes to his for a moment, and then sat back in her chair, looking away towards the gorse-covered hill which her brush had been reproducing on the canvas. She dipped it in color and gave one or two touches, her pale cheeks slightly flushed.

“I should like to think this over,” she said at last, with something new in her manner; “we must talk it out more thoroughly. And—I should like to see—the girl.”

“And you will take all that trouble about me!” Dick exclaimed. “And you don’t hate me for my weakness—worse than that, I fear, though I am afraid to give it a name?”

“No, I don’t hate you for anything,” she said. “I did not think you were immaculate; I fear I should not have had so strong a fellow-feeling for you had you been so!”

Dick impetuously grasped her hand and pressed upon it a passionate kiss.

Self-possessed as she was, the artist seemed a little perturbed, but, woman-like, she had more grasp of the occasion than was possessed by her companion; more foresight, more knowledge of the world. It lay with her at the moment, as she felt, to have an ardent lover at her feet, to encourage a passion that might make or unmake a soul, awaken or destroy the heart of a poet, the motive of a lifetime.

How was she to act? She, who had been so busy trying to untie the knots in another's destiny, had now to face the complexities of her own motives and desires.

Mrs. Ellwood felt a strong temptation to let that beautiful storm of emotion have its way. Her interest in the young fellow had been deeply stirred; the strangeness and novelty of the experience allured her, for she craved for experience as only a woman of strong feeling who has passed her early life

within the walls of a conventional and strictly-ordered home can crave for it.

This yearning had prompted her marriage, against the wishes of her parents, with a handsome but extravagant young artist, whose reckless habits had made her wedded life one of anxiety and often of hardship. Native force of character had enabled her to steer safely through many narrow straits, and it now asserted itself in her mode of facing the problem before her.

The temptation to encourage the eager devotion of a fine nature, just awaking to the full significance of its own powers and the domains that they commanded, was terribly strong. But to the woman of civilization, impulse is only one of the many factors that go to make up her final action. Among average women, perhaps, it takes the smallest of all rôles.

In Margaret Ellwood's case there were at

least three distinct layers of influence at work: the unnoted, but never effaced traces of her early training, which prompted an astonished and virtuous rebuff to this audacious though undeclared lover; the violent reaction against that training, impelling to a wholesale overthrow of the old narrow ideal of womanly conduct; and finally, the new, more gentle rebound from the vulgarer sort of Bohemianism with which she had become more or less familiar through her husband's associates. Threading through these different sets of motives were many little rills of feeling, taking their origin in one or other, and binding the three leading forces in an inextricable union.

Hitherto she had been denied such an experience as this: the men who had been ready to pay her homage in her former life had been too coarse and uncultured to give her a moment's temptation. She knew ex-

actly how they would make love, and their methods had no interest for her; while her pride held her aloof from them inexorably.

Anyone looking into her soul at this moment, unless his perceptions were of almost superhuman nicety, would have been inclined to suppose that her conduct did not, after all, follow the path of least resistance: did not proceed from the sum of motives. What appeared to be the strongest motives sent no representatives to the final result; while those shadowy, half-conscious forces dating far back in her history, even to early childhood, seemed to prevail almost without an effort, as if they had a secret service of nerve messages by which the whole being was automatically ruled.

"You overrate my kindness, as you call it," she said, in a calming tone, leaning back in her chair without looking at Dick, and seeming to compare with her sketch the

farm and hills beyond. "If you knew me better, you would see that I am only following a natural instinct. It has always been my lot to play the peace-maker, and to set people who have muddled their affairs on the straight path again. I can't bear to see things going wrong merely for the want of someone with a cool head to put them right again. I think I must be going home now," she added; "the sun is getting too high for my work."

She rose and briskly began to put together her easel. Dick watched her with sad eyes, feeling as if he had been rebuked. He forgot to help her, until Mrs. Ellwood, struggling with her easel, turned and said:

"Well, Mr. Coverdale, do you call this polite?"

Then he sprang up, took everything from her, in spite of her request to be allowed to

carry at least the paint-box. A child came out from the farm-house opportunely.

“Look here, Tommy,” said Mrs. Ellwood, with her usual quickness of resource; “ask your mother if she will take care of these things for me till I come for them to-morrow.”

Then the two went homeward across the fields together.

Mrs. Ellwood questioned Dick about Dedborough and its distance from Braisted; then she proposed to return with him to see his parents, feeling, she said, that she could better help him if she knew all his surroundings.

Dick felt shy of introducing this new friend at the farm. He had never even mentioned her, and he knew not how to account for her sudden advent.

“Oh, your people don’t know of my existence!” she exclaimed, in surprise; and

then the thought passed through her that this reticence on Dick's part looked like further evidence of his sudden devotion.

"How shall I act? How shall I act?" she asked herself. "Leave it all to me," she said aloud, understanding in an instant Dick's difficulty.

As they passed the half-ruined cottage before reaching the farm-house, Dick said:

"This is where I shall live when I am married."

As he spoke, a ruddy face appeared above the low wall and a pair of stalwart shoulders.

"Holloa, Dick!"

"This is my father," said the young man, coloring. "Father, I met this lady on the moors."

Dick was astonished at the ease with which Mrs. Ellwood entered into cheerful conversation with his father. Her occasional difficulty in understanding what he said did

not seem to disconcert her. Every now and then she entirely mistook his meaning, and replied to his remarks in a manner that caused the Yorkshireman to double up with laughter. He invited her to go in and take "a pick o' sumthing;" his old woman would look after her, if she wasn't too proud to dine with poor folks. Mrs. Ellwood claimed fellowship with poor folks, and accepted the proffered hospitality.

"Mother, this lady has come to take dinner with us," said Dick, introducing his new friend.

"Eh! but why didn't ye tell me before?" Mrs. Coverdale exclaimed, giving expression to her feeling of regret that she had not boiled the ham that she finished curing the day before, nor got in the new potatoes, as she had proposed. "A'm very glad to see ye."

Mrs. Coverdale had on her Sunday gown

of violet merino, adorned with a square design on the chest, which had been suggested by her sister-in-law, Jane. Her red hair had been drawn back from each side of the broad parting over a hair cushion, producing over each temple a sort of mound or swelling; while bridging over the intervening depression sat a black-and-violet chenille cap, which rested upon the richly-pomatumed hair, divided into stiff segments by the teeth of the comb.

“Are these your boys?” asked the visitor, looking at Johnny and Tommy, who stood uncomfortably huddled together, in down-cast attitudes, furtively eying her.

Their red hair and cheeks glowed brightly in the quiet light of the old parlor. Johnny and Tommy colored, and changed their weight from the right leg to the left, and looked at one another, at Mrs. Ellwood, and then at the floor.

“Yes, these are my youngest boys,” said the mother, “and a lot of worry they are; there’s not a day passes but one of them’s in some mischief.”

Mrs. Coverdale continued to chat on in a cheerful vein, recounting the losses among her poultry, and the important events of the farm and dairy. Her soft voice and amiable smile, which revealed unabashed an interminable row of teeth, prevented the catastrophes which she related from causing depression. With her also Mrs. Ellwood conversed without restraint. Johnny and Tommy alone seemed to baffle her, and that by sheer force of silence.

The two laborers, who usually dined with the family, were banished to-day to the kitchen—partly out of social considerations, which become pressing and delicate when there is a question of meal-taking; partly because there was no more room at the

table. The dinner passed pleasantly, in spite of a little nervousness not to be entirely concealed. Johnny and Tommy ate industriously, indulging in very large mouthfuls; church-going being exceedingly stimulating to their appetites, if not to their conversation. Dick spoke but little during the meal.

When it was over, Mrs. Ellwood asked if she might see the house and the farm.

"Why, to be sure!" said husband and wife in a breath.

The visitor lingered long in the kitchen, where a tame hedgehog, three sickly chickens, and a large collie dog, shared the hearthrug amicably. Drawing out a small sketch-book, she asked permission to make a sketch of the group exactly as she saw it before the great old fireplace, with the light of the window that faced the moors striking obliquely through the room and bringing out the rich

gleams on the rows of copper vessels which a young woman, whom Mrs. Coverdale called the "lassie," kept brightly burnished.

"If I may come again next Sunday afternoon, I should like to go on with this; and when it is finished, I hope you will accept it," said Mrs. Ellwood.

"Eh, but it's bonnie!" exclaimed the farmer's wife, in high delight. "And look at they twa bairns ahint the door, just as they stan' at this moment" (Johnny and Tommy disappeared abruptly); "it's real wonderful!"

When the little party presently strolled outside to look at the farmyard, the farmer's wife pointed out the ruined cottage by the roadside.

"The maister's going to have the place made watertight against the time of Dick's marriage," she said.

"Does your son not think of seeing a little

of the world first, before settling down to married life?"

John Coverdale shook his head vigorously: he did not hold with seeing the world—it made a "laad" discontented with his home and his duty. Dick had a "taste o' book-larnin'," and, in his father's opinion, he was none the better of it. The lad had good enough wits, when he liked; but they often went wool-gathering.

Book-learning was one thing, Mrs. Ellwood judiciously suggested, but seeing people and things was quite another.

Mr. Coverdale seemed to have little better opinion of people and things than he had of books.

"There's a lot of rascals about," he observed, winking with the overwhelming astuteness of a countrymen born and bred, "liars and swindlers, and robbers o' widders' houses. My laad's got to bide where he be,

and live and die as his fathers lived and died afore him these three hundred years and more—that's if he don't want to break my heart."

A minute of rather painful silence followed these words.

Mrs. Ellwood recognized with dismay the nature of the characters that she had to deal with, if indeed she intended to take any part in this little moorland drama. She listened absently to the continuous discourse of the farmer's wife about her husband, her sons, her vegetables, her poultry; about the habits and customs of old "Don," the great collie, who followed them as they strolled in a straggling party, with Johnny and Tommy skirmishing in the rear, across the wide stretch of grass-land overlooking Niddesdale.

They passed at the dike at the further end, separating the big field from a group

of pine-trees on the brow of a steep hill; but Mrs. Coverdale paused not in her speech.

Dedborough was visible through the ruddy stems; and Dedborough set the good woman discoursing about her sister and Thomas, and about Bessie and the prospect of Dick's marriage.

Mrs. Ellwood, leaning her elbows on the stone dike, passed her hands over her face in bewilderment. Was it possible that she had arrived at this wild little spot among the hills only yesterday afternoon, and that she was already in the very centre of a flaring, sputtering Catherine-wheel of human passions, of which her own strange and complex feelings formed more than one of the whirling spokes?

Perhaps it would be better for her to leave Winterbridge. Her presence complicated matters—nay, had caused half the trouble.

And then she was strangely loath to quit the place ; moreover, the mischief was done, and her departure would not cure it. She felt that she must think the matter over quietly. At present she was bewildered and disturbed : Dick's sad face distressed her.

She would not allow him to accompany her to the village ; when she left the family at the door, he remained on the threshold looking after her wistfully.

Jane Coverdale showed signs of being offended, because the visitor had not come home to dinner. Her manner had stiffened considerably since Mrs. Ellwood went off sketching on Sunday morning, instead of accompanying the sisters to church. Her rough cotton gown and irreverent-looking hat, with its artistic sweep of brim, were also looked at askance.

During Mrs. Ellwood's absence, her sitting-room, which she had entirely turned upside

down, had been carefully tidied, the disgraced lustres put back on the mantelpiece, the table replaced in the centre of the room, and every vase and album on its ancient throne.

The artist gave an exclamation of dismay.

“If I’ve done wrong, this is my punishment; but verily it is more than I can bear!”

And the work of desecration commenced afresh.

Her mind was busily working as she moved about deposing the objects of Sarah’s pride.

The more she thought about Dick, the more she felt that his was an exceptional nature—more finely organized, more capable of pleasure and pain, than those among whom his lot was cast.

Nothing but a touch of genius could in his circumstances have made him what he was. He had that peculiar vividness of personality

which, in her mind, was another mark of this temperament. There seemed no need in his case for slow acquirement; he was already in touch with things, and knew almost by intuition.

When, later in the afternoon, Jane and Sarah brought in the tea, in a genteel manner slightly tinged with disapproval, their lodger asked them to remain and relieve her solitude. They accepted the invitation, and Mrs. Ellwood proceeded to talk to them in a free and friendly spirit, which to these discreet sisters was exceedingly startling. Jane looked at Sarah, and Sarah looked at Jane, each in doubt whether the other would be shocked if she showed a spirit of toleration, each in her secret heart already melting slightly under Mrs. Ellwood's warmth of manner. The latter had been thinking aloud, under careful disguise, in order to clear up her own thoughts by giving them utterance.

“It’s the most astonishing cheek,” she exclaimed, doubling her third piece of thick country-bread and butter—“the most astonishing cheek on the part of a human being, to suppose that the voice of his conscience is the voice of God! Fancy every Tom, Dick, and Harry, with his musty little scrap of conscience, stale and maggoty as an old cheese, setting up as a casket of heavenly gifts!”

The sisters looked at one another.

“We have Divine authority for believing that our consciences are given to us by One above,” said Jane at last, in the particular tone which she reserved for holy things.

“Ah!” said Mrs. Ellwood, thinking suddenly that perhaps she had gone too far, “then you believe that everyone who follows his conscience, however ignorant and foolish he may be, does the best thing possible?”

Jane laid down some maxims which were

very admirable, but not at all apposite; these Mrs. Ellwood received submissively. Then she pushed away her tea-cup and said :

“I have been revolving one or two questions in my mind, on which you may be able to give me some help.”

The sisters glanced at one another, to see how to take this new departure. Sarah was inscrutable.

“Suppose a young man made love to a girl ” (a wave of disturbance passed between the two) “rather thoughtlessly—partly out of admiration for a pretty face, partly out of desire to please; and suppose that young man afterwards found that he did not care enough for the girl to pass his life with her—what ought he to do?”

“Why, marry her!” replied the sisters promptly.

“That is the response of conscience unalloyed,” said Mrs. Elwood; “is it the re-

sponse of reason?" (The question was not meant for the consideration of the sisters.) "Put yourself in the young woman's place," she continued—"how would you like a man to marry you as a stern duty?"

There was a moment of embarrassed silence; after which, Sarah bashfully acknowledged that she would prefer to be married for love. Both she and Jane seemed a little excited; each longing to continue the conversation, each fearing the opinion of the other upon her indiscretion.

Before long, under the warming influences of tea and the novel consciousness of sympathy in their visitor, they began to unbosom themselves in little disjointed communications.

It appeared that in the early days, before their father's death, when they had all lived at the farm together, a young fellow, the son of a small manufacturer in Leeds, had, as

Jane phrased it, "paid attention" to Sarah. Congratulations had poured in—prematurely, as it proved; for the gay manufacturer retired without fulfilling the expectations he had raised.

"The whole village was talking about it," Jane continued; "and one of our friends had even chosen her wedding present. It was perfectly disgraceful!"

"What, to choose a wedding present?" asked Mrs. Elwood, absently.

"No, no!—to behave as he did, and then to leave her. It does a young woman a lot of harm. My brother John was like to have murdered the man!"

When Sarah was presently called away, Jane told her lodger how Sarah had refused to believe in his faithlessness, how she had lived on for years believing in his promise that he would return to her. She had grown thin and ill, and at one time there had been

some fear of her falling into a decline. As the years went on and she saw nothing of the faithless lover, it seemed as if all interest in life had gone from her; she became moody and silent; little fidgety habits had accumulated, and every trace of good-looks disappeared. She seemed to care for nothing except her Bible.

By her own observations, Mrs. Ellwood was able to add much to Jane's story. This, then, was the secret of the embroidered texts on the counterpane! To this was to be attributed the harshness, the uncomeliness, the starved look in the face that struck the artist so painfully! There was no outlet for the checked emotions but such as could be found in household details, in religious exercises, in the worship of that gentility which forbade the taking of a lodger except for the sake of "company."

This, then, was what happened to a

woman whom a man jilted in early life !
Mrs. Ellwood shivered. Did she dare to
make herself responsible for another such
wreck?

CHAPTER V.

A Midnight Meeting.

MARGARET ELLWOOD, reposing under the hallowed counterpane of her little bedroom, dreamt of Bessie Saunders. She seemed a fresh, buoyant creature, with the radiance of love in her face, and hope playing like a benediction round her head. She was gazing with her large blue eyes across sunlit fields to the little farm on the heights; a soft smile played about her lips. Then suddenly she changed into Sarah Coverdale: the bright face grew drawn and haggard, the smile vanished, the lips seemed thin and tight; she was dressed in a counterpane, emblazoned with red and yellow texts. Her gaze continued to be directed towards

Braisted ; but now it was over cold wastes of twilight, broad and still, and her eyes were dim and expressionless. They were not sad, but the dreamer, as they met her glance, moaned in her sleep.

Next morning Margaret Ellwood took her easel to a ruined cottage in one of the fields ; but she sat doing nothing, or idly sketching, for over an hour.

It was seldom that she felt undecided, but this problem fairly puzzled her. The old creeds were certainly the simpler : one could so easily follow a fixed rule, and let the consequences of one's act look after themselves. That the act should be righteous was the important point. But to care only for results, and not for righteousness ; that was trying indeed, when the question resolved itself into : " Who is to be the sufferer ? Why should this or that one be selected for the post of honor ? " Some strange

freak of Fate had placed the power in her hands, and it was her cruel task to select the victim. If she decided to use her influence, Dick would assuredly do exactly as she desired; this was almost a certainty. Bessie's fate lay at the mercy of a woman of whose very existence she was ignorant.

For the whole of that day Margaret managed to avoid seeing Dick. The only sort of decision that she could come to, was that of doing nothing. Though she had not acknowledged it to herself, she was afraid of her own feelings.

Two days passed in this manner. On the third day Margaret wended her way, through the hot afternoon sunshine, to the City of Rocks. Against the quiet blue sky, a solitary bird, with black plumage, was winging its way majestically southwards; it seemed as if it carried some evil message across the uplands.

Mrs. Ellwood was scrambling through the bilberries and gorse towards the spot where she had first met Dick, thinking of him intently, when she felt a hand on her arm, —she knew what had happened, in an instant, before turning to face her lover.

“At last I have found you!” he exclaimed, not relaxing his grasp. “It has seemed to me all these miserable days as if I had been dead! Why have you avoided me?”

“Because I was at my wits’ end to know what to advise you to do and what to do myself,” rejoined Margaret, sinking down upon the slope. “It was an ill day that brought me to Winterbridge!”

“You wish, then, that we had never met?” said Dick dejectedly.

“No, no! But what possessed me to meddle in your affairs, I can’t imagine. What can I do now but mischief?”

“Is it doing mischief to make yourself beloved?” he asked.

She heaved a sigh of distraction. What delicate steering was needed in this strait, what masterly tact, what knowledge of human nature! It was for her to render harmless the storm of emotion which her accidental presence at that particular juncture had raised; all this to be done in the teeth of temptation, which became every moment stronger, to give reins to events and let Chance work her will.

Margaret felt the sleepy breeze play round her; the hot, languishing scents steal up into her nostrils. The sunshine was warm, and there was a sound in the air of bees humming over their work among the heather. The influences were strong: Margaret's strength had to rise to meet them. The fate of two lives was in her hands.

"Why do you not answer?" asked Dick eagerly, trying to see her face.

She turned towards him frankly.

"I can scarcely muster courage to regret being beloved," she said: "what woman—or man either—could do that? But, unhappily, it is sometimes the case that the happiness of one person is purchased by the pain of another."

"I am ready to take the pain, if it must be," said Dick, flinging himself on the grass at full length: "if I may only have the bliss of being with you, as I am now, on these hills—I will buy that, if I must, as you shall dictate."

Margaret turned away in silence. The struggle was not over yet, but this enemy that she had to fight now was strange and shapeless; it loomed like a great shadow in her consciousness, oppressing her with its undefined power. She had never before

felt so weak under temptation. She was angry with herself and ashamed. Was this desire for experience leading her into heartless coquetry? She certainly did not feel heartless; yet why did she not check this awakening sentiment before it grew too strong to be at her command?

“Don’t let us deceive ourselves,” she said at last. “You must not allow me to become a necessity to your happiness. I am a mere passer-by here—we may never meet after this year—and you will have to do without me, and I—”

“What is the use of life, if one has to live without the people one cares for?” he burst in.

“Happily, life changes—or unhappily, as you like to put it,—we all change.”

She said it mournfully, and her eyes had fixed themselves on the most distant point of the moors, as if the boundless spaces of

heather typified for her the years to come. The breeze was sweeping up over them, and a bird's note sounded sadly through the sunshine. Gaze where she would over the brilliant country, there was a look of beautiful sadness. Why was it that when one faced things sincerely, when one paused to look down into the deeps, always a wail sounded up and notes of lamentation?

"I feel," said Dick, "as if, when you leave this place, I must leave too. Everything else seems impossible. I cannot help it." He bent down and kissed her hand.

"Dick, let us try and be reasonable," she said. "I too shall feel the parting hard." A look of delight leapt into his eyes, but he obeyed a gesture and said nothing. "I don't want Bessie to suffer through me. Tell me, if you can, what your feeling was towards her before we met? Had you any doubts?"

“Yes,” said Dick, “though at the time I should angrily have denied it. I was excited and happy at the moment; but whenever I thought of the future, I felt secretly appalled.”

“And even if I had never come across your path at all, your mind would not have remained undisturbed?”

“Oh, no! I should have felt it all the same, only I should have known less what I had missed.”

“Bessie weighs on my mind,” said Mrs. Ellwood.

As she spoke the words, she became aware of a presence behind her, and starting round, she saw a girl with fair hair, pink cheeks, and large, timid gray eyes.

“Bessie!” Dick exclaimed in a tone of dismay. He glanced at Mrs. Ellwood and rose to his feet.

Bessie's face changed as she looked at his companion : she turned very white.

"How did you come here?" Dick inquired.

"I came to look for you," she said drearily.

"Do you mean to say you walked all the way from Dedborough?" he asked.

"Yes; don't be angry. I met your brother Johnny on the road, and he told me he had seen you walking up here an hour ago, and so I came on."

"My dear Bessie, you must be dead tired," he said; "twelve miles, and these two extra from the farm! How did you get your aunt's permission?"

"I came without it. I ran away."

She turned still paler and sank down on the grass, as if fainting.

Mrs. Ellwood caught her in her arms, and gave Dick a handkerchief, telling him to dip it in the stream. He darted off. Bessie drew away from her companion.

"I'm all right," she said coldly; "don't trouble about me."

Her face was very white, and when Dick presently returned with the handkerchief and spoke in a low voice to Margaret, a curious drawn look came about the corners of Bessie's lips, which entirely changed their usual expression of girlish gentleness.

Margaret resigned her post to Dick, at whose touch a passionate look came into the girl's eyes. She was lying exhausted on the slope, with her head against a stone, Dick bathing her forehead. Margaret hesitated for a few seconds and then left them.

"Do you feel any better?" he asked, stroking the hair away from her temple.

She caught his hand in both hers and held it where it rested.

"Oh, Dick, I have been so miserable without you! It seemed as if Saturday

would never come; and why did you not answer my letter?"

"Your letter? I never got any letter from you."

"But I wrote it and posted it with my own hands, and I got so frightened when you never answered. At last when I had waited and waited, I made up my mind to come to you and ask if you meant what you had said. I thought I could bear to hear you say 'No' better than this suspense."

"Poor Bessie! Poor child!" he said. The gentleness of his tone seemed to soothe her. She was content for the moment to lie there, with his hand imprisoned. Then his silence alarmed her.

"Perhaps you are angry with me for coming," she said, starting up to look into his eyes.

"Not angry," he said, "but sorry you should have had this long, fatiguing walk."

He had turned away his head, though she still held his hand.

“Dick!” she cried in a frightened voice, “what is it? Don’t you care for me any more? Oh, don’t break my heart a second time! I can’t bear it, indeed I can’t!”

She had risen to her feet, and was standing with bent head and hands convulsively clasped together.

Dick felt sick and desperate at heart. To tell this girl the truth seemed almost as impossible as to strike her. She would have forgiven a blow only too easily, but a second disappointment would surely crush her.

“Tell me who was the lady that was with you when I came?”

“Her name is Mrs. Ellwood,” said Dick reluctantly; “she has come here from London to do some sketching on the moors. She is an artist.”

"Then she is married?" Bessie said, with a look of relief.

"She is a widow."

The girl's face fell.

"Ah! she has made you forget me. How I should like to kill her!"

Suddenly she broke into a fit of passionate sobbing.

"Oh, Bessie, Bessie! don't, don't!" cried Dick in despair, not knowing what to do or how to soothe her.

She sobbed on continuously, her face covered with her hands.

"Let me alone," said Bessie; "you have broken my heart! What does it matter to you whether I cry or whether I am quiet—whether I come or whether I go?"

"Why do you say what you know is not true?"

"It *is* true!" said Bessie, with a shivering sob of despair. "I knew it was true before

I came ; I felt it. I have felt that your love was going away from me, everything grew so cold round me—so cold and still : and you never wrote, never came ; of course not, why should you ? I was only a silly girl, who cried because you forgot to talk to her, and so you were sorry and said nice things to her. My aunt says that gentlemen who go to colleges know well how to turn a poor girl's head ; and she said that you, Dick, had come home with all the ways of a gentleman, and I had better not trust you ! Yes, she said just that," Bessie went on, looking out through her tears : "but I tried not to believe it. And all the time you were saying the same things you had said to me, only more and sweeter, to a grand lady from London, and talking about books and pictures and things I don't understand ! What hope have I against her ? And, oh ! I prayed hard to God to let me have you all

to myself—all to myself, and no one to come between us—and He won't—He won't!"

She sank down again and covered her face with her hands.

"Dear Bessie, what shall I tell you?"

"Oh, the truth for once!"

"I doubt if I know myself exactly what the truth is."

"Aunt Wellbeloved says that gentlemen from college seldom do," Bessie returned with a sob.

"The sooner you realize that I'm a worthless fellow the better," said Dick despairingly. "I don't deserve your love, Bessie."

"That means you don't return it!"

He was silent.

With a sharp suppressed cry, she started up, rushed down the little pathway before he could stop her, and was threading her way in and out among the rocks, choosing

her direction so that Dick should not see which way she went. She ran on without pausing, turning off westward as she came to the edge of the heather. She gave a plunge into it, and struggled on with fierce energy. She knew that it grew deeper and deeper as she went on, and that, if she were only swift enough, she could completely hide herself.

It was hard work getting through the stubborn bushes; they were up to her knees, and now they rose higher, swelling round her. She ploughed her way onwards, not daring to look back lest she should lose a moment.

And now it was up to her waist; she was on the brow of a hill, and saw before her a limitless sea of unborn purple, awaiting the death of the summer to assume the pomp of royalty. A few more steps onward brought the billows almost to her shoulders. She

turned then, took one look back towards the rocks, seeing nothing before her but solitude and the twilight. She sank down, and then for miles and miles there was no break in the great sea, over which the wind sent now and again a quiet ripple.

All round her, as Bessie lay, half supported among the tough bushes, there was a gentle harping of the breeze among the upper branches, and a deep sound—half rustle, half murmur—made by the multitudinous stems perpetually stirring and bending, the myriad touches of leaf with leaf: the deep unceasing song of the moors.

By the time Dick realized that Bessie had gone, so swift and sudden was her flight, she had placed a huge line of rocks between them, and he knew not whether she had taken the downward way towards Dedborough, or had gone out into the heather.

He thought it more probable that she had

run home, and his line of search was in that direction. He felt very anxious, for Bessie had displayed a passion of which he had not thought her capable; and the cry which she had uttered on leaving thrilled through him still, for in it there was heart-break.

Margaret, meanwhile, had been wandering restlessly about, longing yet fearing to know the result of the interview. How would Dick act? Which of the opposing forces would have the victory?

“It is the eternal problem that faces the artist,” Margaret mused sadly. “Human ties and human claims against the impulses of a poet. He is a creature like a bird, with a wild instinct of flight. It is too cruel to put him into a cage!”

She thought of the good people at the farm, and a sense of hopelessness came over her. There was an array of solid facts and good reasons, all telling dead against Dick

and his ethereal hopes. Then there was Dick's own sense of duty and his gentle-heartedness. Who could save him?

Just then her eyes caught something white moving among the heather in the far distance—at least, so she thought: she could not see it now; perhaps it had been fancy—and yet she could have sworn. She waited and watched, thinking it might reappear. She looked in vain for some seconds; and then, without much object, but because she felt she must do something, she bent her steps towards the spot where this will-o'-the-wisp had been seen. So repellent and inhospitable were the heather stems, that more than once she nearly lost heart.

But it seemed almost as far to go back as forward, and she went on. She was moving in a straight line, nearly westward, watching the reddening hues of the clouds and the warm flush which was transfiguring the

moorland. She stopped suddenly with a great start as a little cry sounded up from the depths.

“Bessie!”

There was a look, half shrinking, half fierce, upon the face, whose outlines lent themselves more easily to softness. Margaret remembered having seen such a look on a wild and gentle animal, driven to despair by his pursuers. It was a look unutterably pitiful, and it roused all the protective side of Margaret's nature.

“You poor child!” she said, laying her hand on the girl's arm, “what are you hiding from—out here all alone?”

“From everyone!” Bessie returned sullenly, drawing away. “Is there not one spot on the whole earth where people will leave me to myself? Have you a bloodhound with you? Did you scent me out?”

“I did not follow you, believe me. I did

not know you were here," said Margaret. "I saw something white that flashed and disappeared, and I came towards the spot out of idle curiosity."

"Then why do you stop?" asked Bessie curtly, with a repellent gleam in her eyes.

Margaret stood before her for several seconds in silence.

"If you want to make me say I'll give him up to you, you needn't stand there waiting. If you want to marry him, you must marry him. A girl like me will not be allowed to stand in the way of a lady such as you!"

"Why should you suppose that I wish to marry Dick Coverdale?" Margaret asked at length, with a new expression in her face.

Bessie opened her eyes, but made no attempt to reply.

"Do you think," said Margaret, speaking with sudden heat and passion,— "Do you

think, you foolish child, that one cannot feel interested in a man, enter into his joys and difficulties as if they were one's own—that one cannot like him, befriend him, love him if you please, without wanting to tether him to a hearth's side, and collect duties round him, and worries and anxieties, and bills and taxes, and all the dust and ashes, the moil and muddle of domestic servitude?"

Bessie opened her eyes still wider.

"Then you don't want to marry Dick?" she asked breathlessly.

Margaret shook her head.

"He ought not to marry. It would be the ruin of him, and for me,—I live for my work. Do you realize what he is?" she continued. "Do you know how high he stands above his fellows—not only here, but out in the world among the best of them?"

"I knew it!" cried Bessie, "though no-

body believes it here. There is no one like him!" She colored vividly in her enthusiasm.

"You would do anything for him?" said Margaret.

"Anything! Ah! I would have made him a good wife. I would have been true and loving and obedient. I would have toiled and slaved for him; I would have lived—I would have died for him!"

"Poor Bessie! but do you know that such devotion is not the kind that he needs? Dick must never marry an 'obedient' wife! Be as devoted as you please, but not 'obedient.' That takes away all the beauty and the value of devotion."

"What do you mean?" Bessie asked.

"Such wives are only fit for men still stupid and petty enough to play the old childish rôle of 'lord and master.' Dick is worthy of something better."

“But he ought to be the master!” cried Bessie.

“If you want him to love you,” said Margaret, “you must not make a little pasteboard god of him and set him up on a tinsel throne. With an ordinary man, it might perhaps answer—you would only make a common fool into an uncommon one; but with Dick, no! He would despise his little throne, and his little godhead, and his little worshipper!”

Bessie looked scared.

“I don’t understand you. I have always been taught that a wife’s duty is to look up to her husband.”

“Oh, Bessie, you might make Dick very miserable,” Margaret exclaimed, “and through sheer sense of duty! I almost despair of explaining myself; but for his sake as well as your own, I must try. We both love him.”

"You?" exclaimed Bessie.

"Yes, I," Margaret returned. "I tell you this, so that we may stand on equal terms. I have become acquainted with your secrets, and I wish you to know mine, though it is painful for me to speak."

She had two bright hectic spots on her cheeks.

Bessie seemed too bewildered to answer.

"You think that devotion and obedience could make him happy, and you run the risk of ruining his whole career. He doesn't want obedience. He can buy a dog for that. He wants a second self, akin, but different. He wants someone with whom to face life hand in hand; not a mere dependent, whose whole being is ordered by his will. I can imagine nothing that would be worse for Dick at this moment than to marry. He ought to leave this place and travel for a

time ; and if you love him, Bessie, you will not tie him to your side."

Bessie burst into tears.

" Oh, how cruel you are ! how cruel you are ! I *could* make him happy, I know I could. He did love me the other day—till you came ! Ah ! if he were only always like that ! I can't give him up—I can't, I can't !"

Margaret came nearer to the girl, put her arms round her, and drew the golden head down upon her shoulder. Bessie broke down at the kind touch and sobbed.

Margaret smoothed back the hair and drew her hand gently across the throbbing brow without speaking. Bessie still sobbed on with passionate self-abandonment. Sometimes a great rush of jealousy would sweep over her, as she felt that in a few short days this strange lady had learned more about Dick's character than Bessie had learned herself in as many months.

Already she stood outside. Yet she found it impossible to dislike Mrs. Ellwood, or even to resent what she had done: she could not help it; it was Fate. Bessie had loved too passionately, and God had taken away her happiness. But for her all the joy of life had gone. So black and horrible did the future seem for her, that she had some wild thoughts of suicide.

“Oh, don’t take him away from me! don’t tell me to give him up!” she cried piteously.

“No; I will not tell you to do anything,” said Mrs. Ellwood, gently. “Do as you will. The matter is in your hands. Dick is ready to marry you.”

Bessie sobbed still more.

“Gently, gently,” said Margaret. “It is hard for you— Do you know,” she broke off, “I fear it is very late,—I had quite forgotten. You ought to be getting home.”

“No, no; I won’t go home!”

"Your aunt will be so frightened."

"Oh no, she won't be frightened about me. I think she would be rather glad if I were to get lost!"

"How far is it to your home?" asked Margaret.

"Twelve miles."

"Twelve miles! Then you can't possibly get back to-night. What is to be done? The sun is down. You'll have to go to the farm for the night."

"No, no, no!" cried Bessie, desperately. "I won't go—I won't, I won't!"

Margaret tried in vain to reason with her. She would not stir hand or foot, except to avoid Margaret's efforts to draw her homewards.

"But what will you do, Bessie?"

"I don't know. What does it matter? Nobody cares where I am. Leave me alone!"

Margaret saw that it was useless to say

more at present ; and as Bessie tried to plunge deeper into the heather in order to evade her companion, the latter thought it wise to leave her. She must go to the farm for help.

It was hard to decide what ought to be done ; for Dick must now be too far on his way to Dedborough to make it possible to overtake him. Margaret had seen him start in that direction, and did not suspect that by this time he had given up all hope of finding Bessie on her homeward journey, and was on his way back to the moors by another route. Margaret had to set off alone on the two-mile walk to the farm in the rapidly-increasing dusk.

Dick's heart sank as he saw the great stretches of heather lying before him. He was not even quite sure that Bessie had concealed herself here ; and if she had, how was it possible to find her ? The solitude was

profound, the night creeping up like an evil spirit hovering with great black wings over the land.

Behind him, as Dick moved forward, loomed the dark masses of the rocks, and the outlying boulders stood solitary, each at his post, like sentinels of the night.

Dick had no means of knowing how the time passed except by the rising of the stars, one by one, but he knew that he must have been searching for hours. Now and again, as he waded on, he called Bessie's name, but he had grown half to dread the sound of his voice stealing over the moors in the darkness.

Sometimes a bird would start up at his feet and set his heart beating; sometimes he would thrill with awe at the deep silence. But he dared not pause; Bessie must be found at all hazards. Once he stopped short, thinking he heard a sound as of

rustling in the bushes. He gave a plunge forward.

“Oh! Bessie, why did you frighten me so?” he asked, imprisoning her in his arms. “I have been looking for you for hours, and it is the strangest piece of good luck that I have found you. What will your aunt say?—and how cold you are! You are trembling all over. Come back with me to the farm.”

“I can't go there; it is impossible.”

“Where will you go? I will take you anywhere you please—back to Dedborough if you like.”

“Oh, but I could not be seen with you at this time of night! My aunt would drive me out of the house—the whole town would be talking!”

“Idiots!” he exclaimed. “What can be done? You can't go back alone.”

“Oh, let me stay where I am! My heart

is broken. I can't go back and live the stupid life again, with nothing to hope for. I should like to stay out here all night; and yet"—she gave a little shudder—"Dick, it's horrible alone in the dark! Stay with me a little while—I won't ask it for long. Put your arms round me again, as you did that day by the river. I want to fancy it's that moment over again. The sun was shining, if you remember; I could feel it flickering on my face through the leaves of the tree, and the air was warm. To-night it is cold, and it is all black round me, and there is such a dreadful mysterious sound of whispering when one has one's head beneath the heather. That lady says you would never be happy with me, Dick; but it isn't true, is it? I would make such a good wife, I would indeed! She says you don't want a good wife, and she knows you much better than I do; and I mustn't marry you, because

it would give you trouble and anxiety. But if I were to be very careful, Dick, and never bother you, you wouldn't be unhappy, would you?"

"It's not in me to be quite contented, Bessie," he said, sadly; "but I know you would make a man the kindest and sweetest of wives. I don't know how to look you in the face. Will you try to forgive me?"

"Oh, Dick, if you will care for me ever so little, I could bear anything! I would wait for you for years. I would live upon a few kind words. I ask so little, if only I may hope! Do you despise me for saying all this?" she asked, in sudden fear.

"I never respected you so much," he returned earnestly.

"Oh, if I might believe it! When is that lady going away? I wish she hadn't told me to give you up. I keep hearing her voice repeating it. Oh, Dick, she must be

trying to get you from me! She loves you herself!"

Bessie felt Dick's breathing stop short.

"What?"

"She loves you herself; she told me so!"

He trembled from head to foot, but remained silent.

"It's not true what she says about my giving you up?" Bessie repeated, uneasily.

Dick had taken off his cap to let the cool breeze play upon his brow.

"Bessie," he said, rousing himself, "it's getting awfully late; you must really come."

His voice had a new tone in it since he had last spoken. He took her by the hand and drew her forward; she could not resist his touch. He led her back towards the rocks.

"Now we must face the situation, Bessie," he said, as they passed through the unwieldy gates. "If I take you home and

explain matters, it will surely be all right!"

"They wouldn't believe you," said Bessie. "People have already been talking about us. I don't believe my aunt would let me come in. I can't live there. You see, I ran away without telling her, and she always thinks the worst of everybody, especially of me."

"Well, then, you must either go to my aunts, where Mrs. Ellwood is lodging, or else come to the farm."

Bessie had no time to answer, for, turning a corner, not far from the spot where she had left Dick that afternoon, three figures appeared walking down the grassy street. Bessie gave a suppressed cry of horror, and Dick's heart sank; for Margaret's two companions were Jane and Sarah Coverdale. Margaret herself gave a start of dismay when she saw Bessie's companion. She

had never dreamt of finding them together. She gave a hasty instinctive glance at the two sisters, and saw the look, first of recognition, then of malicious disapproval, come into their faces.

“Why, here she is!” exclaimed Jane.

“And with Dick!” added Sarah, beneath her breath. “I always thought that girl’s behavior was peculiar.”

The five figures stood together, looking at one another.

“Perhaps,” said Sarah, in a meaning tone, “Miss Bessie would have been better pleased if we had not taken the trouble to come all this way to find her!”

Bessie seemed to be utterly overwhelmed by the presence of the sisters. The passionate excitement which had previously taken her out of herself died away, and she stood helpless and confused, facing the critics. It was a terrible moment for her.

She knew how merciless the sisters would be, and that to-morrow all Winterbridge and Dedborough would be pointing at her.

“ I found that your father was not well when I got to the farm,” Margaret explained hastily, “and your mother could not come with me. I dared not leave Bessie out all night on the moors.”

“ It seems that she had provided herself with company,” said Jane, with a sneer.

“ Will you be good enough to hold your tongue, Aunt Jane?” shouted Dick, suddenly taking Bessie’s hand.

“ Oh, of course he is bound to stand by her *now!*” said Sarah. “ And the sooner he buys her a plain gold ring, why the better for all parties—that’s *my* opinion!”

“ When we feel we can’t get on without it, Aunt Sarah, we shall come and ask for it,” said Dick.

“ I like his impertinence!” said Jane.

“I can't say that I feel the same about yours,” Dick returned. “Come along, Bessie; my mother will take care of you,” and he tried to draw her away from the others. “Trust to me.”

Her spirit seemed entirely broken. She looked scared and subdued, and allowed Dick to lead her away without a word.

The other three turned and followed.

“Dear me! what a very sad thing!” said Jane. “What a blow it will be to dear Mrs. Wellbeloved, and what a nice reward for their kindness in adopting the girl!”

“It always seemed to me that there was something going on,” observed Sarah; “and for my part, I confess, I never did think much of the girl.”

Margaret was walking a little apart, deeply abstracted.

“I think,” said Sarah, “it is our duty to

hurry on ahead, and break the news to poor dear John and his wife."

"You're quite right, Sarah," said Jane.

Dick thought that his aunts were returning to Winterbridge, and paid no heed when he saw them passing through the little poultry-paddock, and out into the farm-road; it was too dark then to see that they turned to the right instead of to the left.

There was little difficulty in making Mrs. Coverdale hear their summons, as she was still up watching by her husband's bedside. She hastened downstairs to open the door, expecting to see Bessie and Margaret. She was greeted by the sight of her sisters-in-law.

"Oh! my dear!" exclaimed Jane, "I have such sad news to tell you!" Her tone of suppressed glee belied her words.

"Eh! Has anything happened to the lassie?" asked Mrs. Coverdale, much concerned.

“Indeed, I’m sorry to say—”

“She’s not hurt or dead?” interposed the farmer’s wife hastily.

“Would that she were!” said Sarah, piously.

“Eh! but what d’ ye mean? Can’t ye speak out?” cried Mrs. Coverdale.

“It’s not a matter that I’m fond of speaking about,” said Jane.

“It’s our duty to mention it though,” said Sarah.

“Mention *whaat*?” cried Mrs. Coverdale, growing exasperated.

“Why, when a girl’s character is ruined—and it’s so particularly sad that it should have been Dick!”

“Dick!” cried Mrs. Coverdale, bewildered. “Dick’s been away from home since dinner-time to-day. We were wondering what had become of him.”

“It is very painful for us to have to tell

you," said Sarah. "When we went up to-night with Mrs. Ellwood to look for the girl, we found her *with your son!*"

"With Dick!" cried Mrs. Coverdale. "Well?"

"It was midnight," observed Jane, regretfully.

"I fear she is a bold, unprincipled creature," said Sarah; "she is entirely to blame. She's been running after him in a most shameless way for months, and to-day she must have walked all the way from Dedborough to see him. I call it disgraceful!"

As she spoke, the other three appeared at the little iron gate.

"What! you here!" exclaimed Dick, in a tone of disgust. "I thought you had gone back to Winterbridge?"

"Oh, no! we thought it our duty—" began Jane.

“ Oh, hang your duty! We can manage our affairs for ourselves, thank you. Mother, I have brought you Bessie. Be kind to her, won't you?”

Mrs. Coverdale received the girl in silence, allowing her to pass into the house.

The aunts, feeling themselves much ill-used, withdrew with a few fierce sniffs. Margaret had already preceded them to Winter-bridge. Bessie looked ready to faint with fatigue and hunger. Mrs. Coverdale made her sit down before the dying embers of the kitchen-fire, and gave her food and some hot brandy-and-water.

“ Oh, Dick,” said his mother, “if you have taken away this poor lassie's good name, you have done a cruel and cowardly thing!”

“ If it had not been for those old fools!” muttered Dick, beneath his breath.

When Bessie was a little revived, and had

been persuaded to eat something, Mrs. Coverdale's next care was to send her to bed.

“ I will sleep down here,” said Dick; “ she can have my room.”

CHAPTER VI.

For His Sake.

WHEN all was quiet, and Bessie had been left to herself, she rose from her bed, where the farmer's wife had carefully tucked her in, and throwing open the window, sat looking out over the fields towards the rocks. The tears were falling silently down her cheeks as she leant her head forlornly against the sill. She had not a ray of hope now; and all sorts of horrible fancies and fears tormented her. She was lost and disgraced forever! Every face in Winterbridge to-morrow would be looking shocked or sneering over her story. Her aunt and uncle would scorn and disown her. John Cover-

dale would cast her out. Had ever girl so unhappy a fate?

Ah! if Dick had only cared for her, she could have braved even this; but he did not—he did not! Then with cruel distinctness, like so many little daggers in her heart, Margaret's words came to her insistently. She could not struggle with them now. She could not even try to disbelieve them; they were true—true, every one of them. To make him happy was impossible, with all her love and all her submission. He wanted more than she could give. He had ambitions that she did not understand; hopes that she could not share.

The world would cast her out; and there was no place for her in Dick's heart. There was not a soul upon earth that cared for her. She was friendless, hopeless, disgraced!

Below she could hear the voices of Dick

and his mother; and she fancied that Mrs. Coverdale was speaking slightly of the girl who had run after her son in so unmaidenly a manner. Hot, horrible tears of shame came into her eyes. Yes, the torture of her love and her suspense had made her forget herself, and the thought was intolerable.

She could not face them all to-morrow, she would rather die. Yet death was so horrible! And to die thus, without having sincerely prayed to God for weeks and weeks! To die sinning against His will—it would be to enter everlasting torment! She seemed to stand looking into the gates of Hell, with another earthly Hell behind her, and between them she must make her cruel choice. The idea of the morrow had become absolutely terrible to her. She was moving about the room now as one in great physical pain.

“Oh, mother—mother—mother! why did you die and leave me alone like this?”

The hours dragged themselves away one by one. Bessie could just hear the sound of the church clock stealing up over the hills from Winterbridge. The farmyard and the birds began to greet the new day.

Chilled to the heart, ashen white, her blue eyes looking abnormally large, the girl lay waiting in sick terror. But the ordeal had to be faced.

Mrs. Coverdale came to see how she had slept, and to bring her down to breakfast; and then she had to meet the farmer and the two boys. This was trying enough; but when, soon after breakfast, the aunts marched up, brimful of curiosity and excitement to see how things were going, Bessie felt absolutely distraught. She murmured some incoherent excuse and rushed out of the

house, leaving the others to talk the matter over among themselves.

What was to happen to her?—what was to happen to her? As she wandered aimlessly over the fields, she caught the sound of wheels along the farm-road on the other side of the bank. The blood went to her heart as she saw her uncle's little pony-cart, with himself and her Aunt Wellbeloved inside. In a second she was crouching down by the bank, out of sight. The little cart went by, stopping at the farm. The old man alighted. Then Dick came out, and led away the pony to the stable opposite.

The aunt and uncle entered, and Bessie could see nothing but the little gray farmhouse and the trees, and the open field where she was lying, all steeped in gentle repose, which made it hard to picture the scene that was going on in the parlor within. The loud cackling of a flock of geese announced

the arrival of another visitor. It was Margaret.

Bessie's heart beat violently. There was a strong feeling of resentment against the woman, for if it had not been for her, Dick would be loving her still. And yet she longed to speak to her, to tell her everything, to feel the protective arms round her again. Bessie crept up closer, till she was within earshot. She trembled when presently Jane and Johnny came out of the house; Johnny remarking that the lass must be somewhere on the farm, and he would soon find her.

Margaret, on coming up to the boy, asked where Bessie was. Johnny said he didn't know; he had just been sent to look for her, as her aunt and uncle had come about her.

Johnny was fumbling industriously in his pockets, while answering the lady's inquiry; and, after she had passed on down the road, he brought out a large, tangled piece of

string, and at the same time a letter fell upon the road, which he did not notice.

Aunt Jane's quick eyes, however, at once observed it, and she went to pick it up. It was addressed to Dick Coverdale in a girlish hand, and it had the Dedborough postmark. Miss Coverdale did not hesitate very long.

This was a righteous cause : the exaltation of virtue and the discovery of sin. Jane Coverdale opened the letter, and her eyes gleamed.

“Dearest Dick,” it ran,—“I can't imagine what I have done that I should be so happy. Oh! why are you so good to me? The memory of last Saturday is always with me ; I can't think of anything else. I still feel your arms round me, and hear your words in my ear. I fear I have been very wicked, but I find it hard to feel sorry ; because if I had not been so weak, through my love for you, I should not have had the happiness. I

wonder what Aunt Wellbeloved would say, if she knew? Dear Dick, if I have done wrong to deceive her, it was for your sake. Do come next Saturday. I am miserable when I don't see you. Your face is always before me. If you can't come on Saturday, I must come to you.

“Yours for ever,

“BESSIE.”

If proof were wanting of Bessie's levity and ill-behavior, here it was. The postman had evidently given this letter to Johnny to save his coming up the hill, and Johnny had forgotten to deliver it. Such were the ways of Providence. Jane returned with the letter to the house. Mrs. Coverdale, who had been standing up for Bessie, insisting that she was only a little thoughtless, seemed disturbed by the letter, and looked at Dick uneasily.

“If it weren't for the confounded tongues

of a lot of lying gossips, there would be no harm done whatever," he said.

"There's only one way of settling this, as I said before," cried Thomas Wellbeloved, "and that is, that you should marry the girl. You've been hanging round making a fool of her for the last six months; and now, when she does a crazy thing like this and ruins her character, I hold you responsible."

"And my son *shall* be responsible!" said John Coverdale, bringing down his fist on the table. "He sha'n't behave like a scoundrel while he's under my roof! D'you hear, sir? You will marry this girl at once, or else don't let me see your face again!"

As he spoke, all present looked for Dick's reply.

"You have no need to threaten me," said Dick, quietly, his whole mind bent upon saving Bessie from her trouble and on rescuing her dignity. "I should regard it as an

honor if Bessie would accept me ; but as all this absurd row has been through my fault, and mine only, I fear she will not have anything further to say to me."

Jane laughed scornfully. There were general sceptical murmurs round the room.

"When a woman's good name is at stake," said Sarah, with her nose in the air, "I hope even the most ill-guided would hesitate at nothing that could save it."

"There may be things in the world," said Dick, "better worth protecting than what you may please to call a good name!"—a sentiment which so outraged Sarah's feelings that she could not even reply.

"I'm surprised," said Jane, "that any young man can indulge in ribaldry only suited to the ears of his low associates of the public-house, in the presence of two unmarried ladies!"

Mrs. Wellbeloved was about to enter the

lists, when she was interrupted by the unexpected appearance of Bessie, who entered with a step almost firm, and head erect.

An awkward silence fell upon the company. But it did not last long.

“Shameless hussy!” exclaimed Sarah, beneath her breath.

“We have come to take you back with us, Bessie,” said her uncle, in a sad voice. “You have caused your aunt and me very great pain. To think that my sister’s child should lose her good name while under my protection! We shall never raise our heads in Dedborough again!”

“You should have listened to me at the beginning, Thomas,” said his wife. “We ought never to have burdened ourselves with the ungrateful minx! I knew what it would be, well enough!”

Bessie had not spoken a word since her entrance. Her eyes were fixed straight

before her, and her hands were tightly clenched together. The change that had taken place in her face since yesterday startled everyone. Fatigue, exhaustion, and mental suffering were written upon it unmistakably.

“The lassie has not slept a wink all night,” said Mrs. Coverdale, touched, as usual, by pity at the sight of distress.

“I should rather hope not!” said Jane. “If a girl can disgrace herself and her whole family, and then go and sleep soundly after it, I should like to know what things are coming to! Little bold-faced thing!”

“Be quiet, Jane!” said John sternly. “If you’re athirst for evil-speaking, you’d best go down to your own village and do it there.”

“Well, I never!” exclaimed Jane.

“Upon my word!” muttered Sarah.

“Evil-speaking, indeed!” continued Jane,

loftily. "I never spoke evil in my life! I am only speaking the truth!"

"Oh, for heaven's sake, leave the truth alone, aunt!" cried Dick. "It's not the sort of thing *you* ought to meddle with!"

"Come, let's have an end of this!" said John Coverdale, breaking in upon a torrent of abuse which Mrs. Wellbeloved was pouring out upon her niece. "My son will marry the girl as soon as she pleases, and stop all evil tongues."

"I will do whatever she wishes," said Dick. "But she has done nothing to be ashamed of; and if she had, I can't see how my marrying her would alter the fact."

"Look here, sir!" said Thomas Wellbeloved, coming over to Dick. "This girl is the child of my only sister. She confided her to my charge on her deathbed. If you try to back out of doing what is honorable

by her, and leave her with a ruined name, by heaven, you shall answer for it to me! She was as good and dutiful a lass as ever breathed, till you came dangling about and turned her head."

"You were all glad enough to see that Dick was taking to the lass," said Mrs. Coverdale, bridling for her son. "Eh! there's the poor wee turkey got into the milk-can!" she exclaimed, suddenly darting off to the scene of the catastrophe. She returned swiftly, carrying in her apron the young turkey, who was shaking its head violently, resentful of its damp condition.

"Well, then, we understand it's all settled," said Mrs. Wellbeloved, in her harsh voice. "The marriage must take place at once. D'ye hear, Bessie? It's no use standing talking here any longer, so go away and get on your things and come home with your uncle and me; and I hope

you're grateful for all that's been done for ye!"

Bessie did not move or speak. The silence was oppressive.

Dick went up to her, and said quietly, in a low voice :

"What do you wish me to do, Bessie? I curse myself for having brought this upon you! Tell me what to do, and how to save you pain. If I have not utterly lost your love, will you give it me still?"

Bessie drew a little quick, gasping breath, and she turned upon Dick a long, hungry, searching look. Then an expression of pain came into her eyes.

"Yes, I will give it to you," she said ; "and I will give you a proof of it into the bargain!"

Dick took her hand, and everyone thought that the matter was satisfactorily settled. Mrs. Coverdale's kindly face was beaming,

while the young turkey added to the general stir by pitifully cheeping in her arms.

"Please wait a moment," said Bessie tremulously, her hand still in Dick's. "I want to say that—that I will not marry Dick Coverdale!"

So profound was the astonishment created by this announcement, that for a moment no one spoke a word. Bessie remained where she stood, breathing heavily.

"My dear Bessie, what are you taking about? Are you daft?" cried Mrs. Coverdale. "*Not marry Dick!*"

Then followed a chorus of amazement. The whole company was thrown into confusion. Mrs. Wellbeloved scolded Bessie roundly; her uncle remonstrated; John Coverdale was angry.

But Bessie remained immovable. Margaret's words were still in her ears: "If you love him, you will not tie him to your side."

The thought that she was doing it for his sake armed her for this terrible self-sacrifice.

“No, no! I will not!” she repeated, as the storm of anger and remonstrance beat more strongly against her.

“Dick, you’ve not asked the lass properly yet,” said John Coverdale.

“I will not marry him, though he were to ask me on his bended knees!” said Bessie. “Let them talk if they will; I know I have done nothing worse than love him.”

“Very well, then, Bessie,” said Mrs. Wellbeloved. “Then you must look after yourself; I’m not going to have a girl without a character in my house.”

“Oh, hush, my dear!” cried her husband, which only rendered Mrs. Wellbeloved more emphatic.

“Oh, let me go!” cried Bessie, looking with a scared expression at the faces round her. She took Dick’s hand, pressed it pas-

sionately to her lips, and fled from the room.

Jane and Sarah were about to follow and bring her back, but Mrs. Coverdale checked them.

“Let the poor bairn alone,” she said. “You’re just driving her out of her senses amang ye!”

She had rushed out of the house and across the fields.

“Bessie!” a voice called to her.

She broke down as Margaret’s strong, kind arms closed round her.

She allowed herself to be led to a quiet spot under a tree, and there the girl poured out her sorrow.

“But I wouldn’t let him do it,” she said at last. “I wouldn’t let him marry me, just to save a scandal. It is quite true what you said, though I hated it at the time; and I want to thank you for having saved me from

doing a weak and wicked thing. I see things now so differently. I can't believe I'm the same girl who came up here yesterday afternoon to look for Dick. It seems as if years had passed since then!"

"You have been brave!" Margaret stroked the tired head with new tenderness. "And you had so much against you: training, impulse, circumstances—everything! I know what Dick is thinking of you now."

"If he only understands I've done it for his sake, because I love him, I shall be almost content," said Bessie, with a little smile and a sigh. She was lying with her head on a hillock, looking up towards the moors, and did not see Dick, who was coming across the fields from the farm towards them.

"I have no home now," said Bessie; "my aunt won't take me back again!"

Margaret gave an indignant exclamation.

"Never mind; you shall begin a new life,

Bessie—better worth living than the one you leave.”

“A new life, without Dick!”

“Yes; you must try and make one for yourself. You shall come away with me, and see if you can't form other interests; and that will bring you nearer to Dick, not take you farther away from him. Hope shall not be at an end for you. This terrible suffering that you have gone through may have put new things into your hands; it has put new things into your face, poor child. I believe that one of the secrets of life is to learn to dare the very utmost when necessary, as you have done; to turn round and face your dangers—to bid them come and do their worst. Then, once through the Valley of Pain, one comes out into a fresh country with a new horizon before one.”

“You're too good to me,” said Bessie, with a sigh. “I don't feel now as if I mind that

Dick loves you ; at least, not *very* much. You will marry him, won't you?" trying not to finch.

"What! after you have set me such an example! Not for worlds! We must not imprison our eagle before he has even spread his wings."

"But he will not fly *always*," said Bessie, practically ; "when he comes back—?"

"We can both be ready for him with open cages—nicely painted, elegant cages, with every comfort for a vagrant eagle disposed for a quiet life. And then he can enter which he likes—or neither."

"Or neither," echoed Bessie, blankly. "You are joking, are you not?"

"A little," Margaret admitted.

"Ah! don't joke about Dick."

"No joking matter, is he?"

"Ah! don't!" pleaded the girl.

Margaret overcame a temptation to torment Bessie's hero-worship.

"Seriously," she said, after a pause, "when Dick returns from his first wanderings, he will not be in precisely the same frame of mind as when he goes. I shall no longer be seen by him with the same eyes, nor will you. Ah! Bessie, you thought you gave him up forever this morning when you refused to marry him. It is my belief that you drew him to you then, as you could have done in no other way."

Bessie hid her face in her hands, with a low cry. Her heart had given a wild bound as the personal hope woke once more.

"Ah! no, it is impossible," she said presently; "it is *you* he loves. Tell me seriously, will you marry him?"

Margaret laughed softly. Dick himself was standing by, unknown to Bessie.

"In the first place, he has not asked

me," she said, smiling and coloring; "and at this moment the question is particularly awkward to answer."

Bessie turned her head and started up.

"Bessie," he said, going down on his knees on the grass, "you behaved like a heroine! It went to my heart. I know why you did it, when you braved what was for you the most horrible ordeal you could go through!"

"It was for you," she said, feeling shy and happy under his praise.

"I can't tell you how I have suffered in your suffering, Bessie," he said. "You will let me do what little I can to help you; you will let me work for you, as if I were your husband?"

"But I am going now to work for myself, and to face the world," she said naïvely, looking up to Margaret for approval.

"As a great kindness to me," Dick pleaded,

“you will let me help you? You will let me see you now and then?”

She gave him her hand in silence, but could not speak.

“I can't remain at home any longer,” he went on. “I too must begin life afresh. I have health and strength and will, and I hope that something may be done with these. In any case, I am going.”

Bessie gave a frightened exclamation, and then tried to smile.

“It has been a hard struggle to make up my mind,” Dick continued. “The old people will feel it, and I fear that at first it will be difficult for them to get on without me; but it can be done. Half the difficulty lies in the mere thralldom of habit. Moreover, I'm not even sure that it is fair to them to let them accept a life-long sacrifice in ignorance of what they do.”

“Ah! most unjust,” said Margaret.

“People may be greedy about virtue, as well as about other things, and multiply their good deeds, though they burden others with unrighteousness. I wish, before we go, we could see the Moorlands once more.”

“Let us come.”

The broad sunlit fields were traversed, and in another twenty minutes the three had wound their way up the rocky pathway to the spot where Dick had stood on that memorable Saturday evening, watching the sun go down. He told them now how he had come there full of newly-stirred thoughts and hopes; how he had looked over the valley towards Dedborough, and felt as if it typified all that was small and local, dead and prosaic.

“Only six days,” Bessie murmured beneath her breath. “Six days ago I was down there in the valley, in my tiny room, looking out of my little window on to the

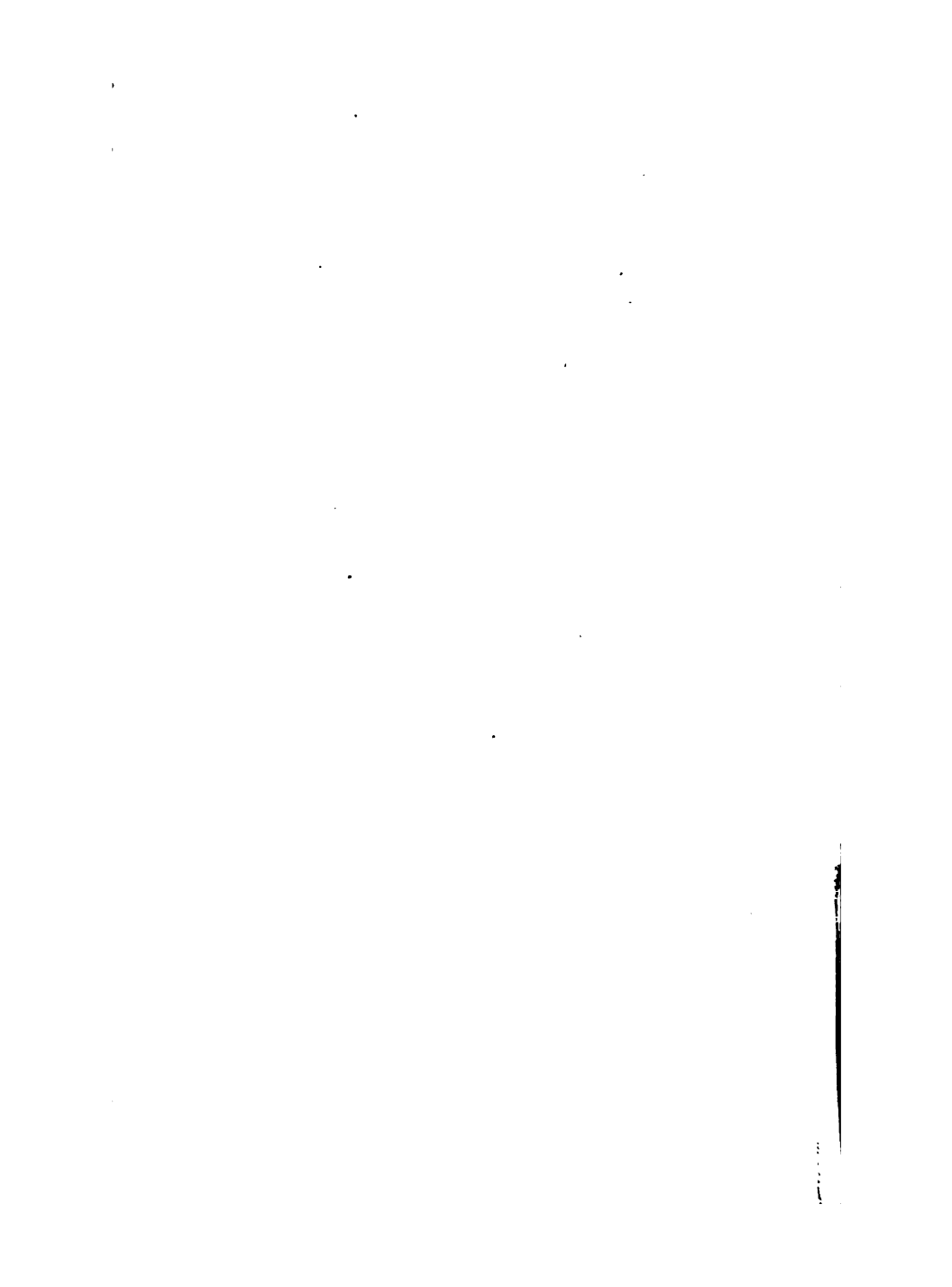
street, trying to imagine myself at Braisted ;
and now I am up here with you both—
so high up! And it is so wild and so
beautiful!”

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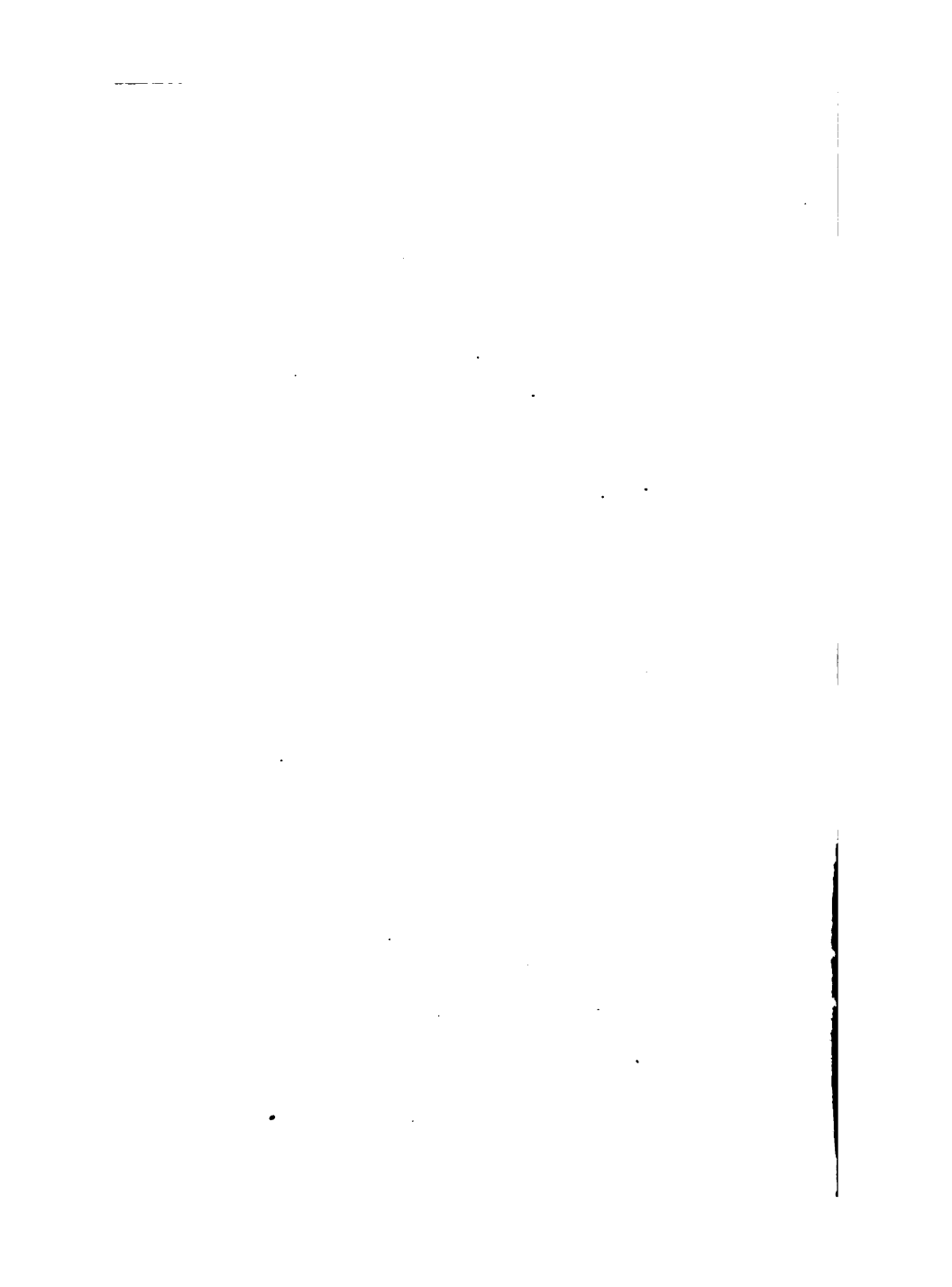
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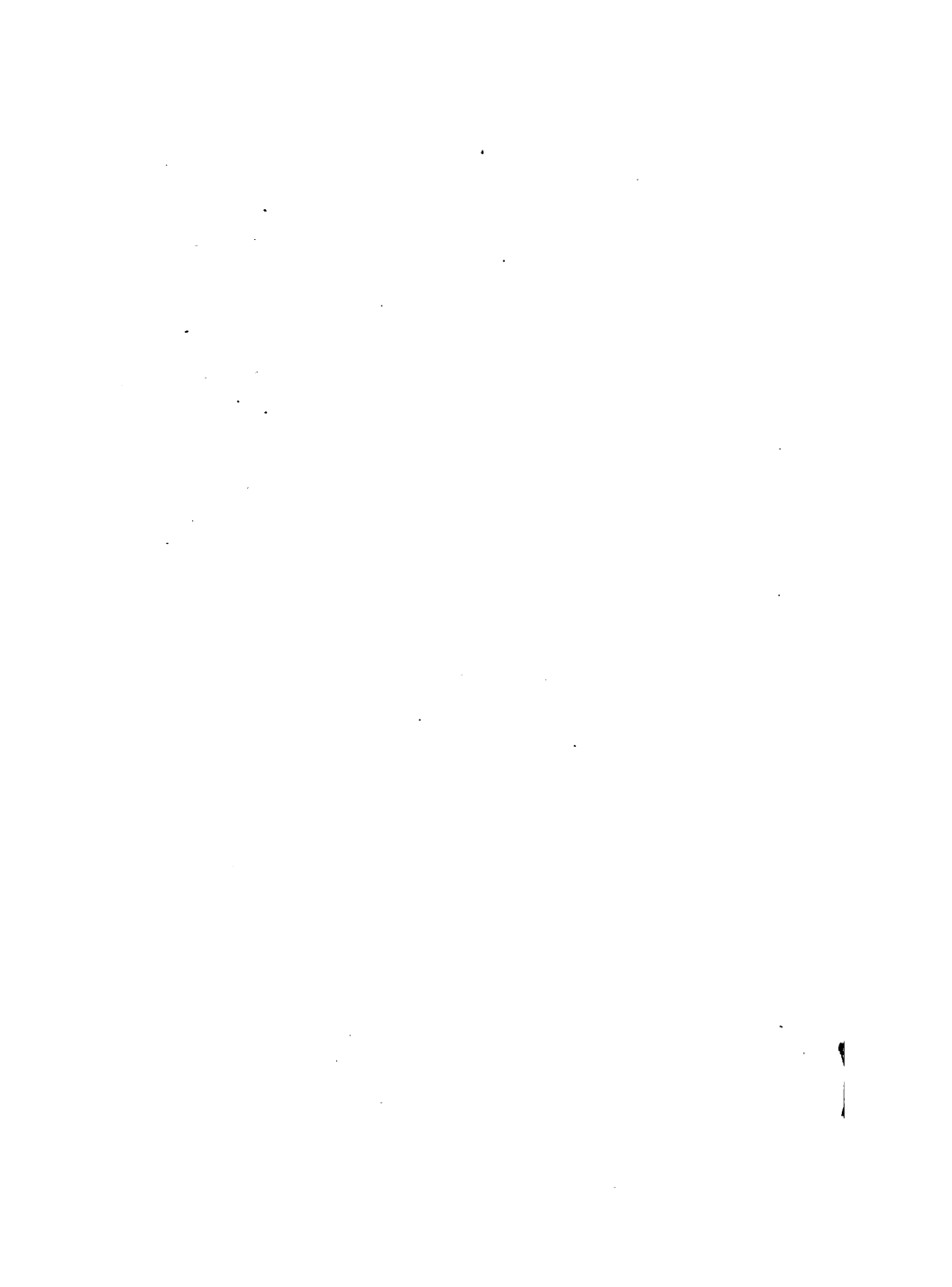
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